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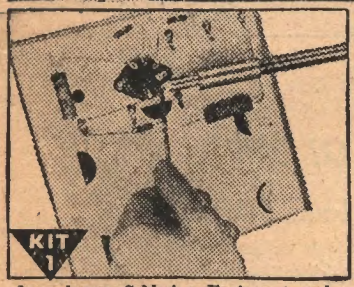

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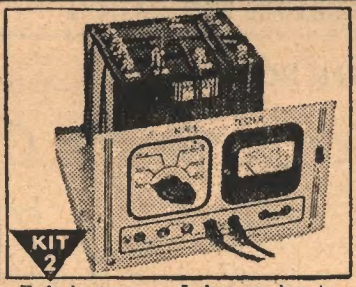

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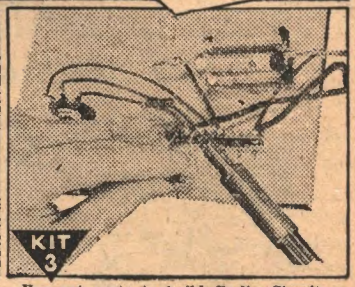

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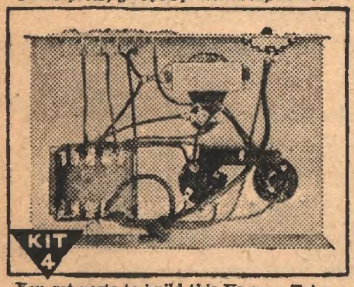

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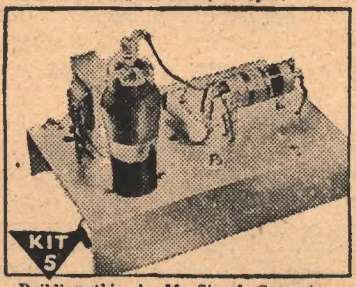

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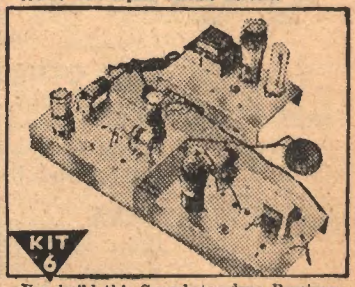

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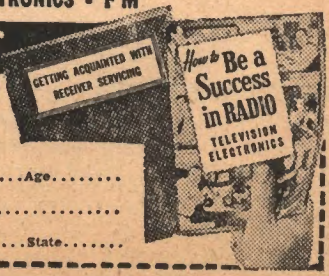

POPULAR DETECTIVE

Vol. XXXIV, No. 3 A THRILLING PUBLICATION May, 1948

A KIP MORGAN NOVELET

Corpse on the Carpet

by Louis L'Amour

She was a honey of a gal, and her jewels had plenty of sparkle, but when Morgan followed her out of that bar, grim Death tagged along! 11

TWO OTHER COMPLETE NOVELETS

WALK SOFTLY, DEATH ..... *Arthur Leo Zagat* 38
A jail cell held the answer to the murder of Vic's policeman father, and the price of learning it would be—Vic's own life!

MURDER BY MIRRORS ..... *O. B. Myers* 72
Brett was a realtor, but he had no interest in plots that were six feet under—even if he got a pretty brunette for company!

FIVE SHORT STORIES

DEATH FROM A FAMILY TREE ..... *Sam Merwin, Jr.* 28
Wilfred I. Hull probably selected the wrong set of ancestors

JAIL AND THE HARVARDS ..... *Joe Archibald* 63
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The only evidence against Gina Macaire is an artist's sketch

DIG IT DEEP ..... *David X. Manners* 95
Detective Carl Carter lets a hunch lead him to an evil killer

AND LET THAT BE A LESSON! ..... *Robert Sidney Bowen* 99
Chet Lacey saves an old man from sorrow, a lady from folly

AND

OFFICIAL BUSINESS ..... *The Editor* 6
A friendly department where our readers and the editor meet

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A DEPARTMENT WHERE READERS AND THE EDITOR MEET

HAVE you ever noticed how trouble sometimes arises when you least expect it? Everything is going along smoothly and then—bingo, you're in a mess right up to your elbows. Of course, trouble more often comes when there has been some warning first. Hints, untoward symptoms, slight whisperings that all is not well. That's the way it happens in:

FISH FOR MURDER

by

WYATT BLASSINGAME

Sam Parker was mighty proud of his new fishing launch. He stood on the rickety wharf and nodded toward it.

"There she is," he said. "All mine!"

"Yours—and Dean Doulton's," his brother, Ed, corrected.

"Mine," Sam Parker said. "Doulton got his last payment two months ago. She's mine—all mine. My luck's been good. The fish running my way, and Mary too."

Sam Parker laughed. He was a big, blond man, barefooted, without a shirt, his skin burned a deep leather-brown and his eyes blue.

"It would make Mary mad as the devil to hear me put it that way," he went on. "She doesn't care for fishing, you know. But I've finally talked her into marrying me next month."

"That's swell." Ed Parker hoped he sounded as though he meant it, for he remembered Mary Wilkins. Personally, he had never thought much of her. But his brother had been in love with her since they were kids.

Narrow Escapes

"In fact," Sam Parker said, "my luck has had to be good. I wouldn't be here otherwise."

He then went on to tell his brother Ed how, on two occasions recently, he had missed bad luck only by a whisker. The first time, he had been working on his boat and had just happened to stick his head over the cabin. A bullet had promptly come whizzing by and missed him by only an inch. It had been some kids doing target practice, Sam thought. They had claimed it wasn't them, of course, but Sam had heard them shooting, and had blamed it on their carelessness.

The second time, Sam's boat had caught fire when he'd been out on the grouper banks, thirty miles from shore. Luckily, Sam had come upon the fire almost the instant it started. But the strange thing was, the fire extinguisher failed to work. It was empty, though it had been freshly filled just a few weeks before.

"Who would want to kill you?" Ed Parker asked. "Who would make any profit out of it? Who would the boat go to?"

"Mary," Sam said. "With my insurance and the house Dad left. But Mary's going to get it all anyway when we are married next month."

There seemed to be no answer to the mystery, so Ed and Sam began to talk about something else—their plans to go fishing the next day.

"I wish we were going alone," Sam said. "But I've given Tom Lacy a regular job. He's working with me regularly."

"Who is he? You sound as though you don't like him."

"I don't," Sam said. "He's a newcomer here, and there's something about him I don't care for." He shrugged. "But he's a good fisherman."

The world was a pale, pre-dawn green when they left the dock the next morning. Pelicans and ducks passed in long, low-flying lines. The gulls wheeled and cried.

"We'll go out the south pass," Tom Lacy said.

Ed Parker looked at him. Lacy was a big man, as big as Sam and as blond, but he carried himself with an arrogance that was annoying. Nevertheless, there was no untoward incident. That is, there wasn't until

(Continued on page 8)

THOUGHTS HAVE WINGS

You Can Influence Others With Your Thinking!

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OFFICIAL BUSINESS

(Continued from page 6)

after nightfall that day, when they were far out.

Red Flame

Then came the explosion.

Ed Parker was lifted, flung into the air, with flame bright around him. Then the water closed over him and he was fighting his way back to the surface again.

There was a red haze of flame against sky and water. The water was in Ed's eyes and nothing was clear. A blur that might have been the launch, only with no cabin now, was shattered and burning.

Ed found his brother Sam and dragged him over to part of the cabin, blown clear of the launch and floating nearby. Somehow he got Sam on it and was crouching beside him.

"I—hurt. . . ." Sam said. "Fire. . . ." His voice drained off.

Ed Parker huddled there beside his brother, listening to the sobbed, racked breathing.

"I—hurt!" Sam said, and his voice was thin with agony. "Stop it, Ed! Stop it from hurting!"

"I'll stop it," Ed said. But there was nothing he could do, no way he could help.

Time and again Ed called Tom Lacy's name, but there was never an answer from the other man. Probably Lacy had gone down with the launch, Ed thought. So there was nothing he could do except kneel there beside his brother and listen to him cry out in pain.

The sun came up. It was a white glare on the empty gulf. Sam Parker died when the sun was two hours high in the sky.

Accident or Crime

This is the absorbing beginning of FISH FOR MURDER, by Wyatt Blassingame, featured novelet in the next issue of POPULAR DETECTIVE. Ed Parker didn't yet know if the blowing up of the launch was an accident—or a deliberate plan of murder. But he was determined to find out. Yet who could have been behind such a murder plan—if it was murder? Mary—the girl Sam was going to marry? But she would have inherited his property anyway. Doulton—the man from whom Sam bought the boat? But Doulton wouldn't gain the boat or anything else if Sam died. Tom Lacy—the man who worked

(Continued on page 112)

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A NOVELET BY

LOUIS L'AMOUR

She was a honey of a gal, and her jewels sparkled, but when Kip Morgan followed her out of that bar—Death tagged along!

CORPSE on the CARPET

CHAPTER I

Strictly Atomic

SHE was sitting just around the curve of the bar, a gorgeous package of girl all done up in a gray tailored suit. Her gams would have wrung a gasp out of Billy Rose and she had the superstructure to match.

The hand that held the glass gave a blinding flash and when I could see again I got a gander at an emerald-cut diamond that would have gone three carats in anybody's bargain basement. Yet when she turned toward me, I could see the pin she wore made the ring look cheap.

No babe with that much ice has any right to drop into a bar like the Casino. Not that I'm casting any reflections, for the Casino is a nice little place where everybody knows everybody else and a lot of interesting people drop in. But those rocks were about three blocks too far south, if you get what I mean.

At the Biltmore, okay. At the Am-

bassador, all right. But here? Well, once in a while some tough joes drop in here. Some guys that wouldn't be above lifting a girl's knickknacks. And almost any of the crowd further south would enjoy nicking a girl for such knacks as these. Even from a fence there was a winter in Florida in those rocks.

It was then I noticed the big guy further along the bar. He had a neck that spread out from his ears and a wide, flat face. His hands were thick and powerful. And I could see he was keeping an eye on the babe with the ice, but without seeming to.

This was no pug, and no "wrassler." Once you've been in the trade you can spot them a mile off. This guy was just big and powerful. In a brawl he would be plenty mean, and no average joe had any business buying any chips when he was dealing.

"Babe," I said, to myself, "you're lined up at the wrong rail. You better get from here—but fast!"

She shows no signs of moving, so I am just about to move in—just to protect the ice, of course—when a slim, nice looking lad beats me to it.

HE'S tall and good looking, but strictly from the cradle, if you know what I mean. He's been wearing pants for some twenty odd years, but he's been living at home or going to school most of them and while he figure's he's a smart lad, he doesn't know what cooks. And when I take a gander at Blubber Puss I can see where this boy is due to start learning, the hard way.

Me? I'm Kip Morgan, nobody in particular. I came into this bar because it was handy and because there was an Irish bartender with whom I talked fights and football. Like I say, I'm nobody in particular, but buddy, I been around.

Somebody tied a pair of gloves on me shortly after I took my first toddling steps, and I grew up swinging leather. Then in the days of bumming from here to yonder, I did some time in lumber and mining camps, then a lot of waterfronts, a war, and back on this beat.

This nice lad who moved in ahead of me hasn't cut his teeth on the raw edges of life yet. Me, I've been butting those raw edges so long I've smoothed a few of them down.

The babe looks like the McCoy. She's got a shape to whistle at and a pair of eyes that would set Tiffany back on his heels. She's stiff with the boy at first, then she unbends. She won't let him buy her a drink, but she does talk to him. Yet she's nervous, I can see that. She knows the big lug with the whale mouth is watching her.

All of a sudden they get up and the boy helps her on with her coat, then slides into his own. They go out, and I am taking a swallow of bourbon when Blubber Puss slides off his stool and eases out the door.

"Bud," I tell myself, "you're well out of this."

Then I figure, what the devil? That rabbit is no protection for a job like that, and Blubber Puss won't play pretty, I can see that. Also, I have always had confidence in what my left can do to thick lips.

They walk about a block and take a cab. There's another one standing by, and the big joe slides into it. I am just about to figure I'm out of it when another cab slides up. I crawl in.

"Follow those cabs, chum," I say to the cabbie.

He takes a gander at me. "What do you think this is—a movie?"

"If it was, you wouldn't be here," I tell him. "Lose that cab and I'll rattle a bunch of five off your chin."

We've gone about twenty blocks when something funny happens. The cab the Blubber is in pulls up and passes the other one, going on over the rise ahead of us. While I am still tailing the babe and her guy, and trying to figure that one, I see his cab coming back, and the Blubber isn't in it.

Then we go over the rise ourselves and I see the girl's cab pulling up at the curb near a narrow street. They get out, and we slide past and pull in at the curb. Their side of the street is light, mine is dark, so I know what to do.

The cabbie takes his pay-off and I slip him a four bit tip. He looks at it and sneers.

"I thought they always slipped you a five and said keep the change."

I look at him cold. I mean, I chill him. "What do you think this is—the cinema?"

The cab slides away and I go around the corner into the same narrow street where the babe and her guy are going, but I'm still on the dark side and there

is a row of parked cars along the curb.

It doesn't figure right. If the big Blubber goes on ahead, that can only mean he knows where the babe and her guy are going. If that is true, that figures the Blubber and the girl are working it together. That means mama's boy is headed for the cleaners.

Only the doll doesn't fit. She doesn't look the type. There is more in this, as the guy said eating the grapefruit, than meets the eye.

The babe has pulled up in front of the side entrance to an apartment house and

KIP MORGAN

is trying to give her young Lothario the brush. He is polite, but insistent. Then the big lug steps from the shadow and moves up behind the kid.

When he starts moving, I start. The big guy has a blackjack and he lifts it.

I yell, "Look out!"

The kid wheels around, his mouth open, and Blubber Puss turns on me with a snarl. Get that? A snarl. The big ape will have it for days, that snarl. When he turned I plastered it right into his teeth with my left hook, then fired my right into the big guy's digestion.

You know what happened? Nothing. It was like slugging the side of a building. That stomach, which I figured would be a soft touch, was hard as nails. I'd thrown my Sunday punch into it and all I got was a rebound.

BROTHER, when I nail them with my right and they don't go down, they do some funny things standing up—usually. This big guy took it standing and threw a left that shook me to my socks. Then he moves in with the blackjack.

The kid starts for him then, but—accidentally or otherwise—the girl's dainty ankle is there and the kid spills over it onto the sidewalk. Me, I wasn't asking any help. I blocked the blackjack with my left forearm and then made a fist and chopped it down to the big lug's eye. I was wearing kid gloves, and they cut to the bone.

Before he can get himself set, I let him have them both in the digestion again. No sale. He tried the blackjack and we circled. I stabbed him with a left, then another. He ducks his head and lunges for me. I caught him by the hair and jerked his face down and my knee up.

Ever try it? What a mess! When I let go he staggered back, his nose so flat he had no more profile than a blank check. He was blood all over, and I never saw him look so good. I set myself then and let him have both barrels, right from the hip, and my right smashed his jaw back until his chin almost caught behind his collarbutton.

He was blind then, but he tried a right and I went under it and put my hip into the right to his midsection. Something came loose that time, and he went down. He shouldn't have taken my Sunday punch. That got me sore. I used to clip them with that, then walk back to my corner and pick up my towel. I never even looked at them. I knew they were cold.

Then, anybody who would slug a guy from behind with a blackjack doesn't play in my league. I'd a good notion to put the boots to him, but I always hate to kick a man in the face when there's a lady around. Doesn't seem gentlemanly, somehow.

I rolled him over on the pavement and he was colder than a pawnbroker's heart. I turned around. The kid is standing there, but the babe has taken a powder.

"Listen," he said, "thanks awfully. But where did she go?"

"Pal," I said, "why don't you let well enough alone? Don't you realize it was a plant? That the doll brought you here for a trimming?"

"Oh, no." He looked offended. "She wouldn't do that. She was a nice girl."

When the big ape turned I plastered his snarl right into his teeth with my left hook

"Buddy, I tailed you and the girl out of the bar because I saw this big mug watching you. Until this guy passed your cab and went on ahead, I figured he was after the girl's ice. But he came here, and that could only mean he knew where she was going."

"Oh, no. I don't believe that," he said. "Not for a minute."

"Okay." I answered. "Better scram out of here before the cops come nosing around."

He scrammed. Me, I am a curious guy. The big potato was still bye-bye so I gave him a frisk. He was packing a gun, which he might have used if I'd given him time. It was a snub nosed .38. I hipped the weapon on me, then found what I wanted. It was a driver's license made out to Buckley Dozin.

Well, Buckley was coming out of his dozin', so I turned away. Then I saw the diamond pin.

Somehow, the doll had dropped it.

Probably when her ankle had tripped the kid. I lifted the ice off the pavement, went around the corner and made a half block, walking fast. Then a cab

That made me think of the pin again, so on a hunch I left the bar and started up the street. There was a jewelry store not far away, and I stopped, taking a

came streaking down Wilshire, and Buckley Dozin was in it. But he didn't see me.

For a couple of days after that I was busy. Several times I looked at that ice. I figured no dame like that would be wearing anything nearly as good as this looked, so I decided it must be glass, or paste. Then I dropped in at the Casino Bar and Emery, the bartender, motioned me over.

"Say, there was a guy in here looking for you. Nice lookin' kid."

His description fitted the youngster who'd been with the girl.

"Probably figured things out," I said, "and wants to buy me a drink."

"No, it wasn't that. He looked serious, was awful anxious to see you. He left this address here."

I took the visiting card he handed me, noted the address at a nice apartment away up on Wilshire, and the name Randolph Seagram.

gander at the stuff in the window. Glass or not, this pin in my pocket made the rest of that stuff look like junk. Walking around to the door, I went in.

CHAPTER II

Stone Cold Dead

THE floor was so polished I hated to walk on it, and everything seemed to be glass and silver.

A clerk walked toward me who looked as if he might consider speaking to either the Rockefellers or the Vanderbilts and asked what he could do for me. I think he figured on taking a pair of tongs and dropping me outside.

"Just give me a quick take on this," I said, handing him the pin, "and tell me what it's worth."

He took a look and his eyes opened like he was looking at this great big beautiful world for the first time. Then

he screws a little business into his eye and looks the pin over.

When he looked up, dropping his glass into his hand, he was mingling extreme politeness and growing suspicion in about equal quantities.

"Roughly, twenty thousand dollars," he said.

THE night before I'd been in a poker game and my coat had hung on a hook alongside of a dozen others, with all that ice loose in my pocket! I took it standing.

"I'd like to speak to the manager," I said quickly.

The manager was a tall, cool specimen with gray hair along his temples and looked like he might at least be Count von Roughpants or something.

"Listen," I said, "and while I'm talking, take a gander at this." I dropped the ice on the table.

He looked at it, and when he looked up at me I knew he was thinking of calling the cops.

"I'm not going to tell you how I got this," I said. "I think maybe the party that owns it may be in trouble. I don't have any way of finding out where the party is to whom it belongs—unless you can help me. Isn't it true that pins like this are scarce?"

He lifted an eyebrow. "I would say very rare. In fact, I believe this to be a special design, made to order for someone."

"All right. I want you to make some discreet inquiries. Find out the name of the person it belongs to and where they live. I don't want anybody to know why we're asking. This party may have some relatives or friends who would be worried. When I find out who, what and why, then I'll know what to do."

"You have some idea to whom it belongs?" he asked.

"I think so. I hope to find out for sure. Meanwhile, do this for me. Take down an accurate description of this pin, then my name and description." I could see the suspicion fading from his eyes. "Then if anything goes haywire I'll be in the clear."

"And the stone?" he asked.

"I'll see it gets to a safe place."

Leaving the store I turned into a five-and-dime and after picking up a box several times larger than the pin would need, I wadded the pin in paper, stuffed it in the box, and then had the box wrapped by their wrapping service. Then I addressed it to myself and dropped it in a mail box.

Emery, the Casino bartender, had said the kid was worried. He might have something.

I caught a cab and gave the address that was on the visiting card the kid had left for me.

None of this was my business. Yet I could not leave it alone. The girl had measured up to be the right sort, yet somehow she was tied up with Blubber Puss who was a wrong G from any angle.

No girl wears jewelry like that when she's willingly working with a strong-arm guy. There was something that smelled in this deal, and I meant to find out what.

The kid lived in a swank apartment. I stepped to the desk and when this lad turned around I said, "Which apartment is Mr. Seagram in?"

He looked at me coolly. "He lives in C-Three, but I don't believe he's in. His office has been calling and we haven't gotten an answer."

"His office?"

"Asiatic Importing and Development Company."

"Oh? Then if they are calling him maybe he didn't go to work this morning."

He frowned. "I'm sure nothing is wrong. Mr. Seagram is often out of town."

"I'll go up," I said.

He was watching me as I started for the elevator. I found C-3 around the corner of the hall, out of sight of the elevator.

There was no answer to my knock, and then I saw the door wasn't quite closed. I pushed it open, and stepped in. Right then I was afraid of what I was going to find.

I found it.

RANDOLPH SEAGRAM lay on the floor near an overturned chair. He was dead, half of a knife sticking from his chest. The lights were on, although it was broad daylight and one whole side of the place was windows.

"Got him last night," I told myself. I took a quick gander around, then stepped to the phone. "Get me the police," I said.

In about a minute, the clerk downstairs is on the phone. I'm still looking the place over.

"What's the trouble?" the clerk asked. "We mustn't have the police."

"Listen, brother," I cut in quickly. "You've got to have the police. This guy is stone cold dead on the carpet. Get me the police. I'll do the talking."

When I got them, I asked for Homicide.

"Mooney talkin'," a voice said. "What's up?"

"There's a guy down here in apartment C-Three of the Cranston Arms," I said, "who came out on the wrong end of an argument. He's lying here on the carpet with a knife in his ribs."

His feet came off the desk with a thud. "Where's that again? Who are you?"

"My name is Morgan," I told him, "Kipling Morgan. Kipling as in Gunga Din."

"Don't let anybody leave," he said. "We'll be over."

Kneeling on the carpet, I gave the lad a hurried frisk. He didn't have any folding money, and his pocketbook was lying on the floor. They had nicked him for his dough, too. But it wasn't what I was looking for.

Knowing my own habits, I took a chance on his.

There were three addresses on a worn envelope, three addresses and a telephone number. I stuck the envelope in my pocket.

When the police came in, I was sitting in the chair by the telephone like I hadn't moved.

"Detective Lieutenant Mooney." The guy who said it was short and square-shouldered, but looked rugged enough for two men. He gave the body a quick looking over, picked up the empty pocketbook, then looked at me. "Where do you fit?" he asked.

"Acquaintance," I said. "Met the guy in a bar on Sixth Street. He left word for me that he wanted to see me. I came up, he was dead."

"When'd you last see him alive?" Mooney was watching me. He had an eye, that dick did.

"About three days ago." I hesitated, then told him how I'd followed him from a bar, and what I'd seen. I didn't mention the diamonds.

"Well," he said, "there wasn't anybody around to help him the second time. Looks like they killed him when he made a fuss."

"I don't think so."

Mooney looked up at me. "Why?"

"Seagram thought the girl was on the level. I think maybe he found her again. If I'm any judge, he was going to try when he left me. Well, he must have found her. Either he learned something he wasn't supposed to know, or they tracked him home and knocked him off."

"Know his family?" Mooney asked.

"Nuh uh."

"Who are you? Your face looks familiar."

Mooney was still studying me. I could see he wasn't sure I was in the clear. He was a tight mouthed guy.

"You know my name," I said. "I used to be a fighter. Light heavy, then. Now I weigh one ninety."

"Yeah, I remember." He studied me. "Every once in a while you hear of a fighter turning crooked."

"Yeah? Every once in awhile you hear of a banker turning crooked, too, or a cop."

"It doesn't sound right," he said. "You followed them home because you figured it was a heist job. Why didn't you call a cop?"

"And have them think I was bugs? You can't walk up to a cop and tell him you think somebody is going to stick up somebody else just because you feel it in here." I tapped myself on the chest. "I knew the signs, and I tailed along."

"You had a fight with the guy?" Mooney asked.

"Yeah." I nodded. "You might check your hospitals. The guy had a broken nose when he left me, and he lost a couple of teeth. He had at least three deep cuts, too."

"You work 'em over, huh?" Mooney turned. "Graham, get started on that."

MOONEY took my address and then I left. Me, I had an idea or two. The girl didn't fit. Somehow she had got mixed up with the wrong crowd, and she might be afraid to ask for help even if she got the chance because of her folks hearing about it. Seagram must have seen her again, followed her, and tried to learn something. That was when he tried to get hold of me. Then he went home, and they got him.

Yet Blubber Puss didn't fit into the killing. He was a gun man or muscle

man. He wouldn't use a shiv. Also, he must have his face well bandaged by now. He would be too easily remembered.

Back in my own place, I dug out a .380 Colt I had and strapped it into a flat holster to my thigh under my pants. This one I'd carried before, and it was ready to use. There was a zipper in the bottom of my right pants pocket, the gun butt just a little lower. I could take a frisk and it would never be found. On my hip I stuck the rod I took off Blubber Puss.

By nine o'clock I had eliminated two of the addresses. The third and last one was my best bet. It turned out to be a big stone house set back in some trees and shrubbery with a stone wall all the way around.

The gate was closed and locked tight. I could see the shine of a big black car standing in front of the house, almost concealed by the intervening shrubbery. Turning, I walked along the dark street under the trees. About twenty yards farther along I found what I sought—a big tree with limbs overhanging the wall.

With a quick glance both ways, I jumped and, catching the limb, pulled myself up. Then I crawled along the limb until I was across the wall. I dropped to the lawn.

My idea of the thing was this: Seagram had run into the girl again. Maybe he had talked to her, probably not. But, mindful of what I'd told him, he must have been uncertain of her, and so he had tailed her. Then he had tried to come in here. Perhaps he had convinced himself she was okay, and he was planning a Galahad. But he had died for messing with something out of his league.

This set-up still smelled wrong, though. The house was too big. The layout cost money. No fly-by-night hoodlums who might use a girl as a plant to pick up some change would have a place like this, or a girl with diamonds like she had.

Me, I was doing an Indian act going through the trees. When I got close I dropped my raincoat on the grass behind some shrubbery and laid down on it where I could watch the house.

There was a distant mutter of thunder, growling off among the clouds like a sleepy man you're trying to wake up and who doesn't want to get up.

The house was big, stone, and the yard was beautiful. A drive swung past the house, made a big circle among the trees. Another drive went past the house to a four car garage. One of the cars was in front of the house. Another one, facing out, stood beside it. The last car had a Chicago license—an Illinois plate with the town name-strip above it.

There were two lighted windows on the ground floor, and I could see another on the second floor, a window opposite a giant tree with a limb that leaned very, very near.

Suddenly, a match flared. It was so sudden I ducked. In the glow of the match, as the guy lighted his cigarette, I could see Blubber Puss. His nose was taped up, and there were two strips of adhesive tape on his cheekbones. His lips were swollen considerably beyond their normal size.

Blubber Puss was standing there in the darkness. He looked like he had been there quite a while.

CHAPTER III

One Against Five

FOOTSTEPS on the gravel made me turn my head. Another man, skinny and stooped, was walking idly along the drive. He stopped close to Blubber Puss, and I could hear the low murmur of their voices without being able to distinguish a word.

After a minute they parted and each began walking in the opposite direction. I waited, watching them go. I took a quick gander at the luminous dial of my wristwatch. After almost ten minutes, I saw Skinny come into sight ahead, his feet crunching along the gravel, and then Blubber Puss came into sight. This time they were closer to me when they met.

"This standin' watch is killin' me," Skinny growled. "What's the boss figure is goin' to happen anyway? We're not hot in this town."

"That's what you say." Blubber's mouth shaped the words poorly. "You suppose they won't have word out all over the country about us? Then knockin' off that kid was a tough break. Why'd

he have to stick his nose into it?"

"That's what comes of not havin' any dough," Skinny said. "We had to make a raise. What easier way to do it?"

"Well," Blubber said, with satisfaction, "we'll get plenty out of this before we're done. Gettin' in here was a break, too. Nobody'd think to look for us in here."

"We better keep movin'," Skinny suggested. The boss might come out and see us loafin' on the job. Anyway, it's near time for our relief."

The two walked on, each in their respective ways. I stared after them, trying to make sense from what I'd heard. One thing was sure. A relief for these two meant that at least two more men, aside from the mysterious boss, were inside. At the very least that made me one against five. It was too many, this late in the evening, especially when I hadn't eaten any dinner.

The ground window looked tempting, but I decided against it. I'd not have time for much of a look before Skinny and Blubber would be back around, and the chances of being seen were too great. I didn't care to start playing cops and robbers with real bullets until I knew what the set-up was.

Picking up my coat I slid back into the brush and weaved my way toward that tall tree. That leafy branch should offer a way into that upper room. It didn't seem like so desperate a chance as going for the ground-floor window.

A few drops of rain began to fall, but this was no time to be thinking of that. I looped my raincoat through my belt and went up that tree. From a position near the bole, my feet on the big limb, I could see into the window.

There were two people in the room. One of them was the doll who wore the diamonds. The other was a younger girl, not over twelve years old. While I was looking, the door opened and a guy came in with a tray. He put it down, made some crack to the girl, and she just looked at him. I could see her eyes, and the warmth in their expression would have chilled an Eskimo.

Maybe I'm dumb. Maybe you'd get the idea sooner. But only now was it beginning to make sense to me. Some bunch of crooks, probably a gang on the lam, from the way the two down below had talked, had taken over this house. The girls were prisoners in what was probably their own home.

The babe who wore the ice that night had been working as a plant. She must have been forced to while they held her sister here. They probably told her that if she didn't stay in line, they would knock off her sister. Or maybe there were others of the family at home whom they could take action against.

Who the bunch was and how they got there did not matter now. The thing that mattered was to get those two girls out of here, and now. Once they were safe, then we could get to Mooney and spread the whole thing in his lap.

Simple? Ever try to take a couple of girls away from five tough mugs? I knew how these boys operated. Randolph Seagram, lying back there on his own floor was evidence enough. These guys were playing for keeps, and they weren't pulling any punches. Nobody had rubber teeth in this setup.

Nevertheless, I was cutting myself in. Or was I? After all, I wasn't any private dick. Nobody stood to make a payoff to me if I was successful. The girl had no yen for me, and at least one of those guys in that house had reason enough to hate my insides. I could get down out of this tree, go back over the wall, walk a few blocks and sit down in a quiet movie and then go home and get a good night's sleep.

I had a good notion to do it.

IF I did that, nobody would ever know a thing. On the other hand, I could go to Mooney with this. That, I told myself, was the smart thing to do. Except for one consideration.

This was a tough mob. Maybe they had left the doll alone up to now. It looked as if they had. But there was no reason why they should any longer. They might decide to blow, and knock off the babes when they left. And they might make a decision within the next ten minutes.

I am still thinking like that when I hear one of the boys down below running. He's heading toward the gate. Another car comes in and swings up under my tree. Two men get out, one of them carrying a briefcase.

"Something cooks," I tell myself, "something you'd better nose into."

See? That explains it. I'm just a nosy guy. Just a guy what's curious. Curious, and with a dislike to see any-

body, like these two girls, getting pushed around.

There was a dark window a little to the left of the girls' window. Working out on the limb, I was out on a limb in more ways than one. I swung down to the ledge of that dark window. It was a French window, opening on a little, imitation balcony.

With my knife blade I got that window open, and stepped down in the room.

For a moment I hesitated, getting my bearings. Then I felt my way through the room to the door.

The hallway was dark, too, and I made my way along it to the stairs, then down. I could see light coming from the crack of a door that was not quite closed, and could hear the low murmur of voices.

Four men were inside. That scared me. There were two men outside, I knew, and two who had just arrived. Counting the three whom I already knew to be inside and the two who had just arrived, there should now have been five in the room.

That meant that there was another guy loose in the house.

Crouching near the foot of the stairs, I peered into the room and listened. I could see three men. One of them was a hoodlum, or I don't know the type when I see one.

The other two were the ones who had come in the car, and I got the shock of my life.

The nearer of the pair, sitting sideways to me, was Ford Hiesel, the famous criminal lawyer, a man who had freed more genuine murderers than any two living men. The man facing me across the table was Tarrant Houston, elderly, brilliant, and famous as a trial lawyer, a man who had for a time been a judge and was now director of some of the biggest corporations on the Coast. The fourth man, the one I couldn't see, was speaking.

"You have no choice, Mr. Houston. The two girls are here, in our hands. If you attempt to notify the police, they will be killed instantly. Their only safety lies in your doing just what you are told.

"Dwight Harley, the girls' father, is in Bermuda. He is to be there for another month. The girls are believed to be visiting their friends in Atlanta, so no alarm will be felt for them. You are Harley's lawyer. We have here, in our hands, one hundred and fifty thousand dollars in negotiable securities. If we took them, we could realize, at best, thirty thousand dollars for them. But you can get their full value.

"That is just what you are to do. You are to take these bonds, turn them into cash, and return that cash to me here. I want you to work fast. I may add, that you'll be watched. We have your home located, and we know you have a wife and two children. If anything goes wrong here, they are to be killed."

"What assurance do I have," Houston demanded, "that you will release the girls after you get the money?"

"Because we have no reason to add murder to this. If we get the money, we leave, and the girls remain here."

"All right." Houston stood up. "I've no choice in the matter. I can handle the bonds. But I wish you'd allow me to communicate with Harley."

"Nothing doing." The reply was sharp. "You can handle those bonds without contacting him. I know you've done it for him before."

Crouched there by the steps, I stiffened slightly. That voice. I knew it from somewhere.

What Houston didn't know was that murder was already tied in with this deal, and what I knew was that those thugs would never leave the girls alive when they left.

Nor, the chances were, would they leave Houston alive.

"What's your part in this, Hiesel?" Houston demanded, as he rose from the table.

THE criminal lawyer shrugged. "The same as yours, Houston. These men knew of me. They simply got me to contact you. I don't know the girls. Nor do I know Harley, but I've no desire to see the girls or Harley killed over a few paltry dollars."

"And some of those paltry dollars," Houston replied sharply, "will no doubt find their way into your pockets."

He turned and walked to the door, and Hiesel followed him.

As they reached the door, I glanced back toward the library where they had talked.

A man was standing in the door, and he was looking right at me.

The gun in his hand was very large,

and I knew his face as well as I knew my own.

It was a round, moonlike face, pink and healthy. There were almost no eyebrows, and the mouth was peculiarly flat. When he smiled, he looked cherubic and pleasant. When his mouth closed and his eyes hardened, he looked merciless and brutal.

He was an underworld character I knew as Candy Chuck Marvin.

"So," he said, "we've a guest." And he added, as I got up and walked out into the open, "Long time no see, Morgan."

"Yeah," I said. "It has been a long time. I haven't seen you since the Redden mob was wiped out. As I remember, you took a powder at just about that time."

"That's right." He gestured me into the library. The fourth man, the hoodlum in the gray plaid suit, had a gun, too. "And where are the boys who wiped out the Redden mob now?"

IT TOOK me a minute to get it. "Where are they? Why, let's see." I scowled, trying to recall. "Salter was killed by a hit-and-run driver. Pete Maron hung himself, or something. Lew Fischer and Joey Spats got into an argument over a card game and shot it out, both killed. I guess they are all dead."

"That's right. They are." Candy Chuck smiled at me. "Odd coincidence, isn't it? Fortunately, Pete Maron was light. That hook held his weight all right. I wasn't sure that it would when I first hung the rope over it. Salter was easy. It's simple enough to run a man down. And it's not too difficult a matter to fake a 'gun-battle.' I pay my debts, Morgan."

I smiled at him. Candy Chuck Marvin was cunning, without any mercy, and killing meant nothing to him.

He had been convicted once, when a boy. After that, nobody ever found any witnesses.

"But this time there's going to be a change," I said. "You're turning those girls loose."

He laughed. "Am I?" He sat down on the corner of the desk and looked at me. "Morgan, I've found one of those set-ups I used to dream about. The boys pulled the Madison Tool payroll job, and they were on the lam. They came to me for a place to hole up. Then I got to talking with the little Harley girl on a train. It was perfect, see? Her parents gone, all the servants on vacations. The two girls were heading for Atlanta—on a surprise visit. All we had to do was take them off the train at the next stop, return here and move in, a safe hideout for at least thirty days."

"Looked good, didn't it?" I said. "Until Blubber Puss followed the girl out of that bar."

His eyes hardened. "Was that you who beat up on Buckley Dozin? I might have known it." Then he nodded. "Yes," he said ruefully, "that was the bad part. We had the sixty grand the boys lifted on the payroll, but it was hot money. Using it would be a dead giveaway. There was little money on the girls, and my boys eat. So I sent the babe out with Buckley Dozin in order to pick up some money."

"Winding up," I said dryly, "by knocking off Seagram."

"You know about that, too?" He looked at me thoughtfully. "You know too much."

And right then I would have sold my chances of getting out of this mess for a plugged nickel.

[*Turn page*]

CHAPTER IV

The Mummy Case

I WASN'T kidding myself any about Candy Chuck. Take the wiping out of those killers back East. Nobody had ever tumbled that those killings weren't just like they looked—accident, suicide and gunfight. Candy Chuck knew all the answers.

"There's no end to it," I told him. "You got in a tight and let Seagram learn too much. So you knocked him off. That got the police stirred up. Now you've got me on your hands. Are you going to knock me off too? Don't you see? It just leads from one to another. And now there's a smart dick on your trail. A wise joe named Mooney."

"I'm not worried about him. Hiesel's close to him. If there's a rumble, we'll know."

"You think Mooney will talk to Hiesel?" I laughed. "Not if I know Mooney. You've got some tough guns outside, Marvin, but when there's a rumble, they'll blow their tops. You got sixty grand in hot money, and for all the good it does you now, you might as well have none. You've got a lawyer with a lot of bonds, but you haven't any cash to work with. The trouble with you, Marvin, is that you figure it all your way. Just like when you were so sure I'd throw that Williams fight because you threatened me."

Candy Chuck Marvin's eyes narrowed and his mouth tightened. "You'd have been smart to let me forget that," he said. "I dropped ten grand on that fight."

"I'm not trying to make you forget anything," I said. "You're in the spot, not me. You want to remember you sent a couple of your boys to fix me up after that fight?"

"It's one thing to smash up a couple of guns with your fists," Marvin sneered. "It's another thing to out-figure me."

This hoodlum with the rod is standing by taking it all in. Most of my talk has been as much for his benefit as for Candy Chuck's. I knew Marvin liked to hear himself tell how smart he was. I knew he would keep on talking. The longer he talked the better chance I had for a break. One was all I wanted, brother, just one!

The hoodlum was beginning to shift his feet in a worried fashion. He was getting ideas. After all, he and his pals were right in the middle of a city, and the cops were on their trail, and they didn't have any money, and they were trusting to Marvin to pull rabbits out of the hat.

Marvin was good. He had these girls here as hostages. He was living in one of the biggest, finest homes in the city, the last place anybody would look. Tarrant Houston wouldn't peep for fear of getting the girls killed. Nobody was around to interfere, and the family lawyer was cashing in a lot of bonds. In fact, once Marvin and his men got away from here there wouldn't be anybody to prove that Houston had not cashed those bonds for himself.

"Think of your men, Marvin," I said. I turned to the hood. "What do you think will happen to you guys if the cops move in? You guys get sold down the river. You take the rap, and the smart boy here has his pretty lawyer to get him out of it. If you ask me, you guys are just losing time from your getaway to let Marvin use you for a fast take—if it works."

"Shut up." Marvin was on his feet. "Don't listen to him, Greer. This two-bit pug is talking through his hat. He's—"

"Y' know, the guy's got somethin'."

The voice was a new one and we all turned. I jumped inside my skin. Whit Dyer had a rep like Dillinger's. He was no smart joe, but he had a nickel's worth of brains and a fast gun hand. And courage enough for three.

"I never did like this set-up," Dyer went on.

"Don't pay any attention!" Marvin snapped. "Where would you be, Dyer, or you, Greer, if I hadn't brought you here?"

"Search me!" Dyer admitted. "But not being here might be good. After all, there's just one way in and out of this yard you know. One way in, one way out. If they block those, were stuck."

Then I saw something. Little things jump to your mind in a spot like that. There was a side window and the gate that led back to the street looked right

on it. A car was coming along that street. I could see the reflection in the display windows. If it turned the corner this way, the lights would—

"Look out!" I shouted.

The car turned and the lights flashed in the window. Nerves were tense and my yell and the sudden flash did it. I hit the floor and snaked out that snubnosed .38.

WHIT DYER took a quick back step and tripped on the rug. Somebody yelled and I saw a leg and let go a shot at it. Then I rolled over and hit my feet, running.

I made the stairs two at a time, and was halfway up before Marvin made the door. They still hadn't figured out where that sudden flash of light had come from and for all they knew the place was alive with coppers.

Dyer rolled over and tried a quick shot at me, but I snapped one back at him that put a hole in the floor an inch from his head. Candy Chuck steadied himself and I knew if he ever got me in his sights I was a dead pigeon. I jumped upward and somehow got hold of the railing at the top of the stairs, and threw myself out of the way just as his bullet whipped by. Then I was running.

I had to get the girls out of there. Skating to a stop I grabbed the knob on their door, but it was locked. One look at the door told me there wasn't time to bust it, so I fired at an angle against the lock and then with a heave the door came open.

"Quick!" I said. "This way!"

The Harley girls caught on fast. They didn't waste any time. I shoved them into the room through which I'd entered.

"Get out onto that tree," I whispered. "You've got to! If you can get down without being seen, hide in the shrubbery."

Dyer and Greer were coming up the steps. They were careful. I had that gun and they didn't know how much ammo I had. Actually, it was half empty, but I also had the .380 which was a better gun, and two extra clips for it.

Backing around the corner of the hall I caught a glimpse of movement on the stairs and fired. Greer was hit, and started rolling downstairs. In the suddenly silent house you could hear his body *thump, thump, thump* from step to step.

Could the shots be heard on the street? I didn't know. But I did know the house probably had walls a foot thick.

The back stairs. The idea hit me like an axe. There would be a back stairs. But by this time Blubber Dozin and his skinny friend had been relieved of their guard duty and were coming inside. So that way was cut off.

I was on a long balcony from which rooms opened on two sides. The main stairway came up one side, but the railings partially cut off my view of it. I knew I had to get away somehow, but fast, before Dozin and his friend saw me.

The hallway was hung with paintings and there were a lot of queer ornaments and art objects standing around. Down beyond me was an old chest, of heavy wood, and against the wall an Egyptian mummy case.

You didn't need to slug me with a ball bat. I grabbed the lid of that upright mummy case and pulled it open. It was empty, and I stepped in and pulled the lid as near shut as I could and still breathe. Inside, the case smelled like dead Egyptian or something, or maybe this one had been embalmed in garlic.

Someone called, "Look out, Ed! He's in the hall!"

Then Blubber Puss answered, "Must've ducked into a room. He ain't in sight."

Heavy footsteps came along, and I saw a dark shadow pass the crack I was keeping open. It was Blubber Dozin. But it was Whit Dyer's voice I heard now.

"I don't like this. Not even a little bit," Dyer said. "This Morgan is a tough cookie. He got Greer."

"He did?" Dozin's voice was worried. "Whit, I don't like this, either. This place will be hotter than a firecracker. Let's take the geetus and blow!"

"Maybe that's the smart thing. I was thinkin', though, if Marvin gets his dough from that mouthpiece of Harley's, he figures on keeping it. I'm for knocking Marvin off and taking the jack."

Honor among thieves? Not so's you'd notice it!

They moved off and I opened the lid just a little wider. I guess mummies don't need much air. But I was no mummy—not yet, anyway. Getting bolder, I stepped out. And I stepped right into Skinny.

His jaw dropped open so far you could have put a bottle of Pepsi-Cola in edgewise, and he backed up, gulping. I guess he figured the dead was coming to life. He was so startled that I slapped his gun arm away with my left and lowered the boom on his chin with my right.

He went down like he'd been dropped off the Chrysler Tower, but his finger tightened on the trigger and a shot went off.

Somebody yelled down the line and I heard feet beating up the stairs. Those feet were coming toward me.

CHAPTER V

Hot Foot

GRABBING up Skinny's gun I opened up and went to blasting. I wasn't shooting at anything, just making the boys nervous. I let them have four rounds and then started off down the hall running full tilt. I was almost at its end when the roof seemed to fall in. Something crashed me on the noggin. I took about three full steps and then passed out cold.

When I came out of it, I was lying on the floor in the library and Candy Chuck was sitting over me with a rod. I tried to move, but he had tied my hands behind me and wrapped me up with a couple of yards of clothesline. By craning my neck I could see that Dyer, Skinny, and Dozin were also in the room.

"Don't squirm," Candy Chuck said politely. "Just rest easy." Then his face tightened and he leaned over and began slapping me. When he stopped, his face was a snarl.

"Where's the babes?" he said.

"What babes?" I asked innocently. "I thought you had 'em."

"Don't give me that," he said. "You hid them some place. Now give, or I'm going to see how long it'll take to burn your foot off."

He would, too.

"Don't do it," I say. "I can't stand the smell of burning flesh. Reminds me of a guy I saw get it in the hot seat, once. You should be interested in that. It won't—"

He booted me in the ribs, and it hurt.

I stopped. I had no yen to get kicked around, and there was a chance he hadn't found my .380. No normal frisk would turn it up. Yet he might kick it, and then he would find it. Those ropes weren't bothering me. I had an idea that given a few minutes alone I could shed them like last year's blonde.

"Listen, sport," I said, and I was addressing Dyer, Skinny and Dozin, as well as Candy Chuck. Skinny I noticed, had a knot on his head where he had hit the deck, and his jaw was swollen. "Just listen. Why don't you boys play it smart and drag out of here with the dough you got? Gettin' money-hungry has ruined many a good man."

"Shut up," Marvin said.

His rosy plan didn't look so good now. He was sore, and he was also uneasy. The girls were gone. He had the outside watched by the two lugs I hadn't seen yet, and so he was sure the girls had not left the grounds. Without the girls he wouldn't get the money from Houston.

"I'd take it on the lam," I repeated. Then I added, as an afterthought, "This place is filthy with telephones."

He jumped. Then he jerked erect. "Dozin, you and Palo get busy and hunt those babes! Don't stop until you find 'em. You, too, Dyer."

Dyer didn't move. "Look who's giving orders," he said. "I'm stayin'. This guy on the floor makes sense. I like to listen."

Candy Chuck looked up, and if I had been Dyer I wouldn't have felt good.

"All right," Candy Chuck said, "stay."

Candy Chuck Marvin was big time. You couldn't dodge that. He had been the brain behind many big jobs, and he had stayed in the clear a long time. Also, he had friends. Whit Dyer was merely a guy with a gat, a guy who would and could kill. And he was about half smart. When Candy Chuck softened up, I knew that Dyer didn't have long to live.

Candy Chuck Marvin had been a big operator around Chicago, St. Paul, and New York. He had connections. Back in the days when I was slinging leather, I'd seen a lot of him. From all I knew, I figured I was the only guy who ever failed to play ball with him and got away alive. He'd ordered me to throw a fight, and I hadn't done it.

It was a warm morning. It had cooled off during the night, but it was cozy again now. Marvin got up and walked

over to the fireplace. There was a little kindling there, and he arranged it on the andirons. Then he calmly broke up a chair and added it to the fuel. He lit a crumpled newspaper and stuck it under the wood. Then he picked up the poker and laid it in the fire. When he put the poker there, he looked at me and grinned.

Me, I was sweating. Not because it was hot, but because I was wondering how I'd take it. You may read about people being tortured, but you never know how you'll react to getting your feet burned yourself until it happens.

THE fire was really heating things up when suddenly I heard the door close, the sound of footsteps, and there was Hiesel, the criminal lawyer. He looked at me, then at Marvin.

"Who's this, Chuck?" he said.

"A nosy guy named Morgan. He got the girls out an' hid 'em some place." He grinned. "I'm going to warm his feet until he talks."

Hiesel's smooth, polished face tightened. He looked down at me.

"This is the man they have the call out for, Chuck. A police call out for him. You'd better get rid of him."

My eyes went to Hiesel. Get rid of me? Just like that? Brother, I said to myself if I get out of this I'm going to ask you about that!

"And Chuck—Tarrant Houston's gone to work getting those bonds sold. He's working fast on it, too. He's afraid for the girls."

"He should be," Marvin answered and smiled. "We'll take care of the girls as soon as he shows with the money. And him, too."

"That's what I was going to suggest. Might as well make a clean sweep." He licked his lips. "But that older girl, Eleanor. I'd like to talk with her, in private, before anything is done."

Candy Chuck Marvin looked up. He laughed coarsely. "Talk? I see what you mean. I'd like a private talk with her myself."

That poker was hot by now. Candy Chuck pulled it out of the fire and Ford Hiesel's face turned slightly pale. He left the room, unable to take it. Candy Chuck laughed, and began untying my shoe.

"I wouldn't do that," I said, "I haven't changed my socks since I started chasing you guys."

"Smart guy, huh?"

Candy Chuck's eyes were gleaming. He started to pull off my shoes when a calm, low voice interrupted.

"I wouldn't do that."

We both looked around. Eleanor Harley, her face a bit drawn, but as beautiful as that first day I'd seen her in the bar, was standing in the doorway. Candy Chuck lunged to his feet.

"Come here!" he demanded. But she turned suddenly and ducked out of sight. He ran after her.

It was my chance, and I took it. Kicking my tied feet around, I got the ropes that bound my ankles across the red hot poker, then struggled to a sitting position and began working at my hands. The knots weren't a good job, and lying there on the floor I had managed to get them a bit looser.

That clothesline burned nicely and I could hear Candy Chuck Marvin banging around in a room nearby when the first rope came apart.

I kicked and squirmed, getting the other ropes loose, then managed to struggle to my feet.

Forcing my wrists as low as I could get them, I backed my hips through the circle of my arms. Then falling on my back I got my hands in front of me by pulling my knees against my chest and shoving my feet down through my arms. Then I went to work on the knots with my teeth.

Then I heard somebody coming and looked around to see Blubber Puss. He opened his mouth to yell and I dove at him, driving my head for his stomach. He no more than had his mouth open before I hit him head down and with everything I had behind it.

My head caught him in the midsection and he went back through the door with an *oof*, hitting he floor hard. Still fighting those ropes, I kept moving. They came loose as I was rounding into the passage to the back of the house, but suddenly I got an idea, and, gun out, I raced for the library again.

Grabbing up a couple of carpets I stuffed them onto the fire. They caught hold and began to burn. Then I took another carpet and, spilling a pitcher of water they'd had for mixing drinks over it, I put it on the fire. All that smoke on a hot day would make people very, very curious.

Somewhere out in the back regions of

the house I heard a girl scream. I wheeled around, and saw Whit Dyer looking at me. He had a gun in his hands and you could see the killing lust in his eyes.

My gun was ready and I've had lots of practice with it. Dyer jerked his up and I let go from where mine was, just squeezing the shot off. The sound of that .380 and his .45 made a concussion like a charge of dynamite in that closed-in room.

I heard his bullet hit the wall behind me, and saw a queer look on his face. Then, looking at the spot over his belt buckle I squeezed off another one. He grabbed his middle like he'd been eating green apples and went over on the carpet, and I went out the door over him.

Somewhere outside there was a crash and then a sound of shots. I didn't know what it meant, but I was heading toward that scream I'd heard.

CANDY CHUCK MARVIN had caught Eleanor in the kitchen. She was fighting, but there wasn't much fight left in her. I grabbed Candy Chuck by the scruff of the neck and jerked him back. His gun was lying on the table and I caught it up and heaved it out the window, right through the glass.

Then I tossed my own gun on the floor under the range. There was a wicked gleam in Candy Chuck's eyes. He was panting and staring at me. He was bigger than me by twenty pounds and he'd been raised in a rough school.

"What gives?" he said.

"You," I said. "The Marines have landed out there. In here, it's just you and me."

He lunged, throwing a wallop that would have ripped my jaw off. But I slipped it and smashed one into his wind that jerked his mouth open. I hooked my left into his wind and he backed off. I followed him, stabbing a left into his mouth. He didn't have blubber lips but they bled.

I hooked a short, sharp left to the eye, and smashed him back against the sink. He grabbed a pitcher and lunged for me, but I went under it and knocked it out of his hand.

Eleanor Harley was standing there, her dress torn, her eyes wide, staring at us. Then the door opened and Mooney stepped in, two cops right behind him, and Tarrant Houston following them.

Mooney took in the scene with one swift look. Then he leaned nonchalantly against the drain board.

"Don't mind me," he said. "Go right ahead."

Candy Chuck Marvin lunged at me, and caught me with a right that knocked me into the range. I weaved under a left and hooked both hands short and hard to the body, then I shoved him away and jabbed a left to his face. Again, and then again. Three more times I hit him with that left, keeping his head bobbing like a cork in a millstream.

He got under it then, his face bleeding, and lunged in close. He grabbed me, but I could work in the clinches too. I got my shoulder under his chin and bounced him away. Then I hooked a left, short and hard. I felt the nose bone crunch under it, and I pulled the trigger on my Sunday punch. It went right down the groove for home plate and exploded on his chin. His knees turned to rubber, then melted under him and he went down.

Me, I staggered back against the drainboard and stood there, panting like a dowager at a Gregory Peck movie.

Mooney looked Candy Chuck Marvin over with professional interest, then glanced at me approvingly.

"Nice job," he said. "I couldn't do as good with a set of knucks and a razor. Is he who I think he is?"

"Yeah," I said, "Candy Chuck Marvin, and this time you've got enough on him to hang him."

Ford Hiesel shoved into the room. "Got them, did you?" he said. "Good work!"

Then he saw me, and his face turned sick. He started to back away, and you could see the rat in him hunting a way out.

"This guy," I said, "advised Candy Chuck to get rid of me, and told him it would be a good idea to get rid of the girls and Houston—to make a clean sweep!"

Eleanor lifted her head. "I heard him say it!" she put in. "We hid in the closet behind the mirror in the hall. We slipped into it, feeling we would be safe. They never guessed that mirror was a door as well as a mirror."

Ford Hiesel started to protest, but there had been enough talk. I shoved him against the drainboard, and when I was between him and the rest of the

room, I whipped my right up into his solar plexus. The wind went out of him like a pricked balloon and he began gasping for breath. I turned back to the others, gestured at him.

"Asthma," I said. "Bad, too."

"What about the diamonds?" Mooney asked suddenly. "Why didn't they pawn them.?"

Eleanor turned toward the detective

"They talked about it;" she said. "But the only man who would have handled the diamonds here was picked up by the police, and Marvin was hoping he could arrange things, meanwhile, to keep the diamonds for himself."

Then I told her about the pin, and she came over to me as Mooney commented, "I know about that. A clerk named Davis, at the jewelry store, got in touch with me when they checked and found out the pin belonged to Eleanor Harley. That and the smoke tipped us off to this place."

She was looking up at me with those eyes, almost too beautiful to believe.

"I can't thank you enough for what you've done," she said. "There's no way I can ever repay you."

"Sure there is," I said, grinning. "Let's go down to the Casino and talk to a couple of bartenders while we have some drinks. Then I can tell you all about it."

Ain't I the cad, though?

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Wilfred spun fast and, with all the force of his pivot behind it, swung his fist to the point of the well cut jaw

DEATH FROM A FAMILY TREE

By SAM MERWIN, JR.

Wilfred I. Hull probably selected the wrong ancestors—for when he started to scrap you'd think he came from a line of boxers!

WILFRED I. HULL sat in the outer office and reminded himself sternly that there was nothing to be afraid of. As a certified public accountant, he visited many more impressive places almost daily without a qualm. But here on his own business, he could not escape the same nervousness that had assailed him on his first job-seeking interview.

Seeking reassurance, he stared at Mr. Orrin S. Gorman's secretary, who sat alongside her monitor board, serenely typing away. The triangular black-and-gold name plate on the desk in front of her proclaimed her a Miss Carroll.

But the very perfection of her pert profile—from carefully curled carrot top to twenty-four inch waist, where the desk abruptly shut off the view—was somehow alarming. As if aware of his regard, she paused in her labors to lift her head and bestow upon Wilfred a quick little smile that revealed a dimple

and dazzling, even, white teeth.

"You say you haven't received Mr. Gorman's letter, Mr. Hull?" she inquired politely.

"N-not yet, Miss Carroll," Wilfred stammered, wondering what you had to do or be to converse easily and assuredly with such a piquant goddess. "You know—the mails. If Mr. Gorman is too busy, I'll . . . but I *did* want to know."

"Of course you do," said Miss Carroll soothingly. "Mr. Gorman *is* busy on a very important case this morning, but I think perhaps he can work you in."

"Th-thank you very much—I shan't take long," said Wilfred. Overwhelmed by Miss Carroll's kindness, he shifted his gaze to survey the other two men in the outer office.

One of them, the younger, was casually, even sloppily dressed, but he wore his tweed jacket and baggy flannel slacks with an easy lack of self consciousness. He had a craggy homely-handsome face and his voice was very deep.

"If Weaver puts over his pitch before we get a chance with ours—what then?" he asked.

"Gorman didn't get his reputation as a genealogist by listening to only one side of a problem," said the older man who sat beside him on the office sofa. "Relax, Hollingsworth."

HE WAS a well-combed, gray-haired, pink-faced older man, addicted to costly looking dark coat, striped trousers and white-piped waistcoat.

His left hand rested on a new looking pigskin brief case, which he had firmly refused to let go of since his entry several minutes earlier.

"I wish he'd see us all at once," said the other man.

"Leave it to Gorman," the gray-haired man advised. He stood up, walked to Miss Carroll's desk and informed her unblushingly that he wanted to wash his hands. She gave him the key to the washroom and he departed, carrying his brief case. His companion lighted a cigarette and sat back on the sofa.

The door to the inner office opened then and out stepped a tall, sleekly-tailored, dark-haired young man who wore his natty clothes like a motion picture leading man. He smiled smugly at the young man on the sofa and lifted a hand in salute.

"Good luck, cousin mine," he said, ran a thumb and forefinger across his upper lip. "Gorman will see you now." He winked at Miss Carroll and walked on out into the hall.

Hollingsworth got up quickly and glared angrily at the closed outer door. His lips moved briefly in silent profanity. Then he punched a fist into his open palm and swung hastily through the door to the inner office and disappeared as it swung shut behind him.

Alone with the terrifyingly beautiful Miss Carroll, Wilfred cleared his throat. He was working himself up to a conversational gambit when the sharp unmistakable sound of a shot fired somewhere nearby rang out.

"Backfire?" said Wilfred hopefully. Miss Carroll, jumping up from behind her desk, hurled him a look of scorn.

"Twenty-two stories up?" she said. "Come on!"

They entered Gorman's office together.

There Hollingsworth stood staring stupidly at a towel on the carpet, a towel whose white midsection had been disfigured by a jagged hole surrounded by an ugly brown patch of burned cloth. Perhaps six inches from it lay a gleaming nickel-plated revolver. Hollingsworth stared at it like a man hypnotized.

It was Miss Carroll who crossed to a half-open closet door. Wilfred followed her cautiously and wished he hadn't. Mr. Gorman was lying half in and half out of the closet, which contained a lavatory and water cooler. No man could be alive with the hole he had in his head.

"The gun came through the door," said Hollingsworth with apparent irrelevance until Wilfred saw, through the haze that had formed in front of his eyes, that the betweeded young man was nodding toward another door to the corridor.

"But it couldn't have," said Miss Carroll earnestly. "That door is always kept locked."

"Well, it did," said Hollingsworth. He took a quick step toward it, but Miss Carroll got in front of him.

"Don't touch it!" she said. "Maybe fingerprints . . ."

The gray-haired man with the white-piped waistcoat and brief case came through from the reception room, took

one look at the proceedings and knelt by the corpse.

"Gorman's dead," he said, verifying the obvious. "Miss Carroll, call the police—the Homicide Bureau." He rose, dusted off his hands, picked up his brief case and herded them all back into the outer office.

"Did you kill him, Tom?" he asked Hollingsworth. Then he added, "No—don't answer that here. Witnesses."

"Well, I didn't!" snapped young Hollingsworth. "I don't understand it. When I went in there I only—"

"Save it for the police," said the older man. "Remember, I'm your lawyer." He turned to fix first Wilfred, then Miss Carroll, with a fishy stare. "And remember, you two are both witnesses to all that has happened."

"But we didn't see anything," said Wilfred. "All we heard was the sound of the shot."

"How do you know what you saw or didn't see?" said the attorney sternly. Uncomfortable silence ensued until the whine of sirens in the street below announced the police.

OUT of the apparent confusion of Homicide in action, order was not slow in appearing. A stocky, cigar-smoking officer in plain clothes, Lieutenant Venner by name, took over the questioning as soon as Photography had done its stuff and the Medical Examiner's boys got to work.

"What sort of an outfit is this?" he asked Miss Carroll. Gen-genealogy is a new racket to me."

"Genealogy," explained Miss Carroll with the air of one who has had to do it often, "is the determination of the ancestry of an individual or a family." She went on to explain how, frequently, it was essential to lawyers seeking to prove the rights of legatee clients in estate litigations. She then cited a case in hand.

"Mr. Hollingsworth here and Mr. Leffords, his lawyer,"—with a nod toward the gray-haired gentleman—'are trying to prove Mr. Hollingsworth's right to a share in the Lucius Weaver estate. It's all very complicated."

"Weaver left just before the shot," said Mr. Hollingsworth, thereby earning himself a frown from his attorney.

"He won't get far if he's mixed up in this," said Lieutenant Venner. "Hey—but if Weaver's alive, how come you're trying to get a share of his estate?"

"It's Mr. *Lucius* Weaver who is dead," said Miss Carroll brightly. "This was his nephew, Mr. Morgan Weaver."

"He's not his nephew until he proves it in court," said Mr. Leffords hotly. "We claim he is only a nephew by marriage through a second cousin once removed who had the same name. My client is a true nephew through his mother."

Lieutenant Venner simply stood there and looked at Leffords. The lawyer subsided, white piping and all.

"How much dough is in the estate?" Venner asked.

"Allowing for taxes and—litigation costs and other expenses, it should be probated for upwards of a half million dollars," said Mr. Leffords pompously.

"That ain't sisal," said the detective. He then inquired as to where he could get hold of the missing Morgan Weaver and was given his address by the attorney.

"How come there's any dispute about it if your boy here is the rightful heir?" Venner asked.

"There isn't," said the lawyer testily. "Mr. Weaver was attempting to prove a collateral relationship which, combined with his tie by marriage, might entitle him to a share of the estate. He and my client tentatively agreed to let Mr. Gorman issue an opinion out of court."

"I get it," said Venner. "In English, this meeting here was a showdown of sorts—right?"

"In the vernacular—yes," replied the attorney.

He questioned both Hollingsworth and Leffords about the murder. Both men denied ownership of the revolver, both denied having killed Gorman. Then Morgan Weaver, who had been found, was brought in and put through the same ritual. Then and only then did the detective turn on Wilfred.

"And now, Mr.—er—Hull, what were you doing here?"

"I've—I've been having an ancestor of mine looked up to see if he was my ancestor," said Wilfred inanely. "That is, I wanted to see if he was, and Mr. Gorman promised to let me know yesterday. But the letter he mailed me didn't come and since my office is nearby, I thought—"

"Who was this ancestor?" Venner asked. "Did he have anything to do with this Weaver estate business?"

"It's most unlikely," said Wilfred earnestly. "You see, my middle name is Isaac and it occurred to me that Captain Isaac Hull, who commanded the *Constitution* when she beat the *Guerriere* in the War of Eighteen-Twelve, might have been one of my forefathers. Mr. Gorman was very interested. He seemed to think there was a chance."

Wilfred knew it sounded silly. His statement failed utterly to express the longing of a lonely, totally undistinguished person for even a vicarious claim to fame. But something of his earnestness must have come through, for the lieutenant didn't rub him about it.

"What do you do for a living, Hull?" he asked instead.

WILFRED told him about being an accountant. The detective then asked him to give an account of what he had seen since entering the office some ninety minutes earlier.

After a couple of stammering false starts, Wilfred forgot his shyness in his desire to be of service, forgot even that he had an audience. With an unsuspected gift for mimicry, he acted out everything he could remember, which was considerable, thanks to his trained mathematical mind.

He showed how Leffords and Hollingsworth had been sitting, how the lawyer had left with his brief case, how Weaver had appeared from the inner office, stroking his upper lip and smiling smugly at his rival, how the shot had sounded a moment later, how he'd hoped it was a backfire.

It was far from a brief performance and, when he had finished Hollingsworth had been carted off to the tombs and dusk had fallen outside. Somehow Wilfred found himself walking through the lobby of the building with Miss Carroll trotting along at his side. Her curly red hair, he saw with some surprise, came barely above the level of his shoulder. Somehow, he had thought her to be taller.

"Can—can I take you anywhere?" he inquired with a blush at his own temerity when she showed no signs of taking leave of him. She gave him a pleased smile, as if he were a very young puppy who had just done something unexpectedly bright.

"Why, yes," said the red-head. "I'm hungry."

Somehow he found himself sitting across a table from her, his fingers fumbling with the stem of an unaccustomed cocktail glass. Across snowy napery, Miss Carroll looked like something he had heretofore met only in the movies.

"You can call me Leonie," she said, fishing with graceful determination for the olive in the bottom of her glass. "Which of them do you pick as your killer?"

"Do you think one of *them* did it?" said Wilfred, horrified. "I mean, they all seemed so—so gentlemanly."

"You'd be surprised at what passes for a gentleman these days—or at the passes some gentlemen make," said Leonie Carroll. "My money's on old Leffords, the lawyer. He had the best chance with that hall door. These locks aren't foolproof by any means. Poor Mr. Gorman. If he hadn't kept everything locked in his own head, we might know who did it."

They argued it out over dinner and then Wilfred took Leonie home in a cab. All the way uptown he was very conscious of the warmth and fragrance of her on the back seat beside him. But he didn't know what to do about it, so soon after a murder. So he compromised by merely sitting.

On the way back to Greenwich Village, where Wilfred lived in a one-room-bath-and-kitchenette apartment, the driver spoke up as they were stopped by a traffic signal.

"Hey, bub," he said. "Has that babe got a husband?"

"Goodness, no. I mean—not that I know of. Why?"

"I think somebody's tailing us," said the jehu.

"It seems highly unlikely," said Wilfred as they got under way again. But all the same he peered out the rear window and noted the ominous twin headlights that stayed a block or so behind them no matter how they turned.

"What'd I tell you, bub?" said the driver as they went through Madison Square. "Oh—oh! Here he comes!"

Half expecting to hear the sudden rat-tat-tat of machine-gun fire, Wilfred cowered low in the seat as their pur-

suer, a big gray car with a multitude of chromium fittings, swept past them and went serenely on its way. Wilfred discovered that he was sweating and mopped his brow.

"Guess I'm a little nervous," he said.

"Who ain't?" the driver replied philosophically. They went on down to the Village without further incident and Wilfred paid him off in front of his apartment house.

He stood on the curb for a moment as he put his wallet back in his pocket and turned to enter the building. It was then that he heard the hum of a racing automobile motor. Instinctively he looked around—to see the headlights of a swiftly moving car as it mounted the sidewalk and came leaping at him like some infernal nightmare chariot.

Wilfred screamed. At least, afterward, he decided he must have screamed, for his mouth was still open when he regained the power of conscious thought. He was lying flat on the sidewalk up against the wall of the building, staring at a pair of tail lights as they disappeared around the corner. Somehow he had been able to get out of the way.

HE LAY there for a moment, noticing that his fingernails felt raw and scraped from trying to dig into the concrete. Then, slowly and a little unsteadily, he got to his feet and automatically began dusting himself off.

"Crazy drunken fool!" he told himself. But he didn't convince himself. And the car that had so nearly wiped him off the face of the earth had been a big gray car. He had caught a brief impression of flashing chromium fittings as it swept past him.

Somehow he made the self operating elevator work and got up to his apartment. He was trembling like a leaf as he sank into the lone armchair his place boasted.

When he felt up to rising again, he walked to the telephone. The more he thought about it, the less it seemed like the vagary of a drunken driver. Lieutenant Venner ought to be told about it. He, Wilfred, should demand protection. He was not entirely unacquainted with what had happened more than once to witnesses in a murder case.

The only trouble was that he hadn't witnessed the murder. He had only heard the shot go off. Lieutenant Venner would probably think he was merely suffering from the vapors. Wilfred looked at his scraped fingertips. No, it had been real enough, but he was safe in his own apartment.

He withdrew his hand from the telephone—after all, a descendant of Captain Isaac Hull of the *Constitution* should be able to face his troubles alone. After fixing the chain on the front door, he undressed and went to bed.

Visions of the body of poor Mr. Gorman were succeeded by those of a racing gray car and a lovely red head in quick succession and he began to fear a wakeful night. But just as he was about to turn on the light and read, he was awakened by the ringing of the telephone and opened his eyes to discover that the sun was shining once more.

"Venner," said a familiar voice. "I want to see you in Gorman's office in an hour. Can you make it?"

"I'll be there," said Wilfred gamely. He was glad now that he hadn't reported his near misadventure of the night before. Somehow it didn't seem so deadly in daylight.

But when he reached the office, Leonie was there and, when he saw her, he had to tell her about it. Her light brown eyes widened as she listened to his recital. Unlike himself, she was unwilling to dismiss the episode lightly.

"Lieutenant Venner!" she said, calling him from a conference with Hollingsworth and Leffords at the other end of the room. "Someone tried to kill Mr. Hull last night."

"What's this?" roared the detective. His eyes, cold and blue, narrowed as she recited Wilfred's story.

"Is this true?" he asked Wilfred. When Wilfred nodded, Venner exploded. "Why in the devil didn't you let me know when it happened? If I thought you had any dangerous knowledge, I'd have put a man on you."

"But I don't know anything!" wailed Wilfred.

Venner took considerable convincing of this, but he finally had to give in. He contented himself with making Wilfred for a second time reenact everything that had happened in Mr. Gorman's office the afternoon before.

Wilfred went through it twice, just as he had after the murder, while Venner, a cigar dead in his mouth, looked

on. But at the second performance's conclusion neither he nor Wilfred nor anyone else present knew a bit more than they had before. Finally Venner gave it up.

"I'm going to put a man on you," he said. "For your own safe keeping. Be careful. Even if you don't know from nothing, this guy thinks you have something on him. If he gets a chance, he may try again. We don't want him to succeed. So take it easy."

"Any progress?" Leonie inquired. Venner shook his head.

"Found any clue as to which way your boss had decided on the will business?" Venner asked in his turn.

Leonie shook her bright red head, pointed to the big pile of documents on her desk.

"I've been through everything," she said. "In deals as confidential as the Weaver-Hollingsworth one, Mr. Gorman didn't allow me to make copies until the decision was made. Whoever killed him must have made away with whatever he had. All I know is that he had a statement ready."

VENNER nodded and shook his head.

"A mutt of a case!" muttered the detective. "Three guys with equal opportunity." He saw his listeners' look of surprise. "Yes, Weaver could have done it. He could have unlocked the door while he was alone with Mr. Gorman and then stuck his head through from the hall and shot him."

"But the door to the closet would have cut off his view," protested Leonie. Venner looked at her and sighed.

"I hadn't thought of that," he said somberly.

Wilfred and Leonie went to lunch together. Wilfred's office had given him time off until the case was settled and he enjoyed Leonie even more by the light of day than in the lamplight of the evening before. She had a redhead's wonderful milky skin and needed and used little make-up.

"What are you going to do, Will?" she asked him over coffee and sherbet. Wilfred made a gesture of helplessness.

"What can I do?" he countered. "I don't know who did it. The police will have to trace the gray car if they can. It's their business to get the killer."

"If he doesn't get you first," she said slowly. "I think he'll try again. Will, don't you know *some*thing you haven't told yet—some little thing maybe that might be unimportant to us, but which might scare the killer to death."

"Honestly, I don't know what it could be," Wilfred replied. He didn't feel shy with Leonie any more. He didn't even mind that she was beautiful. He felt comfortable and pleasantly excited. He had too many other fears to be afraid of her good looks.

"But Venner is bound to learn who has a gray car," he said, like a boy, whistling in the dark.

"I don't think he'll trace it easily," she said. "It was probably rented—or borrowed—or stolen. A man with nerve enough to—why, hello, Mr. Leffords."

On Wilfred's hesitant invitation, the attorney sat down and mopped his brow with a handkerchief. He accepted the offer of a cup of coffee gratefully.

"Had the dickens of a time locating you two," he said. "Dear me, this is a mess, isn't it?" He paused.

"Yes?" said Leonie, regarding him watchfully. The lawyer seemed to be unsure of himself.

"If you hadn't picked the restaurant nearest poor Gorman's office, I never should have succeeded," he went on. Then, "May I speak in strictest confidence, Mr. Hull?"

"I guess so, if it isn't too strict," said Wilfred. He winced then, at the feebleness of his own joke. Mr. Leffords ignored it.

"In behalf of my client," he said, "I am naturally interested in discovering whether you saw or heard anything yesterday morning which might be prejudicial to his interests. If you—er—should happen to remember such an incident, I—we might be willing to make it worth your while if you would inform us before you told Lieutenant Venner. My client's life may well hang in the balance. This is off the record, of course."

"And you can be thankful for that!" snapped Leonie, her face a sudden angry red. She glared up at Mr. Leffords so hard that he upset his coffee, spilling some of it upon his beautifully creased trousers.

"Sorry," he said, rising and backing away and trying to mop off the stain all at the same time. "I guess perhaps I should have known better."

"I guess you should have," said Leonie angrily, but to his retreating back. "I *hate* lawyers. Will, what would your ancestor, Captain Hull, have done to a man like that?"

"Challenged him to a duel maybe," said Wilfred, feeling a pleasant if vicarious glow of self righteousness. So Lawyer Leffords had the wind up. Wilfred felt a wonderful sense of power and then recalled the quick blaze of those headlights outside his apartment the night before. He didn't feel so powerful then.

"Did Mr. Gorman really decide Captain Isaac Hull was my ancestor?" he asked to change the subject.

"He went on to higher rank, though," said the girl. "Oh, dear, I wish I could remember exactly. Hasn't it come in the mail? It was one of a whole batch of letters."

WILFRED made a gesture of apology.

"I forgot to look this morning," he said. "With Lieutenant Venner and all." He wondered if he could make plain to this marvelous creature how important, to his utterly undistinguished existence, it was to prove that he stemmed from something famous and heroic.

"Let's go and see," she offered, then blushed again, but not from anger, added, "if you don't think I'm being too forward in wanting to see the letter."

"Of course not," he said softly. "I'm glad you're interested. But I'm not much of a ladies' man."

"That," she said, "can be remedied," and he walked out of the office on a cushion of ozone.

It was not far from the restaurant to his apartment below Washington Square, and they decided to walk it. They were halfway there when Wilfred saw the follower who kept himself a discreet distance behind them. He was a tall man who wore rather shabby looking clothes.

"I don't like it," said Leonie when he pointed out to her the fact that they were being trailed. "He doesn't look like a policeman to me."

"When policemen don't wear uniforms, they look no different from anybody else," said Wilfred.

"That is what you think," said Leonie. "Oh, dear, I wish you could figure out what it is that you know."

"You and me both," said Wilfred. He glanced again at the man on their trail. By contrast, perhaps, or perhaps because of some faint resemblance, he thought of the dapper Weaver. Unconsciously his fingers went to his upper lip.

"Good gosh!" he cried, stopping abruptly and staring at the girl, who regarded him with mild astonishment. "I just thought of something! Do you remember how Weaver went this way—" he ran his thumb and forefinger once more across his upper lip "—when he came out of Mr. Gorman's office and spoke to Mr. Hollingsworth."

"Yes," said the girl. "I remember. But what about?"

"Don't you see?" Then Wilfred's excitement faded. "It's so trivial that it can't be very important. But it just occurred to me that a man would do this—" he repeated the gesture "—only if he were used to wearing a mustache. One of those little British type ones that he could flatten against his upper lip. And if Weaver wore a mustache—"

"Perhaps the police would recognize him," Leonie cried excitedly. "And if he's the kind of a man the police would recognize, your gesture must have frightened him out of his wits—particularly if he had just killed somebody." She paused and scowled. "But that closet door!"

"It wouldn't have been in his way if he'd killed Mr. Gorman *before* he came out of the office," said Wilfred, his mind working overtime. "That would explain the towel. I thought that gunshot made an awful lot of noise for a shot that was fired through a towel."

"Then you mean—" Leonie's voice was breathless.

"Sure. If Weaver did it, he must have shot Mr. Gorman before he came out. Perhaps he asked for a drink when he got the bad news and Mr. Gorman took him to the cooler in the closet. He could have grabbed a towel and shot him in there with none of us the wiser."

"And then he could have unlocked the corridor door and come out into the outer office. Remember, it was he who told Mr. Hollingsworth to go on inside. He was jumping at a chance to frame somebody else. He had probably planned to escape by the hall door, unlocked it and all, and then heard Hollingsworth's voice in the outer office."

"Will!" said Leonie. "You've got it. Then he could have opened the corridor

door and fired a second shot through the open window and tossed the gun inside. Old Captain Hull or whatever he was would be mighty proud of you now."

"You really think so?" said Wilfred.

"I'm sure of it," said a voice directly in back of them. "Nice going, Hull. I was afraid you'd work it out eventually—you or that dumb Venner. And I couldn't have it. Not after destroying the only piece of evidence that could keep me from cashing in on the Weaver estate."

UNDER the shabby clothes and turned down hat the handsome face and perfect figure of Morgan Weaver were all too evident—as was the muzzle of the pistol that made an ugly bulge in his topcoat pocket.

"I told you he didn't look like a policeman," said Leonie femininely and with utter irrelevance. "Oh, dear."

"Wh-what are you going to do?" Wilfred asked. His knees were shaking.

"What would you do in my place?" was the answer. "Keep on walking, Hull—you too, Miss Carroll. If you were going to Hull's apartment, that ought to do very nicely."

"If you think I'm going to—" began Leonie angrily. A prod of the gun into the small of her back and a "For heaven's sake!" from Wilfred caused her to obey, if sullenly.

Wilfred gave her a sidelong glance. Her head was high, her walk defiant. She was brave, she was lovely—and all at once he realized that she was going to die—all on account of what he had just told her.

She was the first attractive girl who had ever been kind to him, bumbling, nondescript Wilfred Hull. And for that kindness she was going to be pushed out of existence. So angry was Wilfred that he almost forgot he was certainly due to cash in his chips himself.

What would Captain Isaac Hull, pacing the quarter-deck of the wonderful old *Constitution* have done. Without closing his eyes, he tried to visualize the doughty old sea dog.

Hull—Captain Hull—had believed in letting the enemy get close aboard before delivering his opening broadside. Deadly initial impact had been the secret of his maritime success in battle. Well, the enemy was close enough.

Furthermore, Captain Hull had believed in sudden, shocking surprise—and certainly the murderer was expecting no resistance from Wilfred. After all, *he* had the gun.

Something happened to Wilfred then, something which might or might not have been atavistic. He had been involved in a murder not of his own free will. So had Leonie. He had been nearly assassinated the night before. Now he was really up against it—and so was Leonie, through no fault of her own. It was simply too much of a bad thing.

It was as if a control light in his brain had turned suddenly green. Wilfred spun fast and, with all the force of his pivot behind it, swung a right fist directly to the point of Weaver's well cut chin.

Leonie screamed then as Weaver, caught off balance, crashed to the sidewalk. Wilfred, unaccustomed to fisticuffs, hesitated for a fatal second before following up his attack—and the killer was back on his feet. His eyes were narrow as he swung the gun in his pocket toward Wilfred.

A pistol cracked hard and sharp, and Wilfred wondered why he didn't fall

[*Turn page*]

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down. He had heard of men so numbed by the shock of a bullet that they felt nothing.

Then he looked at Leonie in sudden panic. But she too was upright.

It was Weaver who collapsed, slowly, to lie on the concrete with blood spurting from his shoulder. And a plain-clothes man, carrying a police positive in his right hand, came up on the run, putting a whistle between his lips . . .

"No, Weaver wasn't Weaver at all," said Lieutenant Venner, later. He was studying a photograph of the killer to which a Centre Street artist had appended a thin mustache, matching it with a poorly screened snapshot of the same man.

"This picture," he said, indicating the snapshot, "is the only one on record of Kansas Jolley. He's wanted in seven states for everything from fraud to bluebeardism. Young man, you've cut yourself in for a slice of a whole lot of rewards."

"I wonder what happened to the real Morgan Weaver?" Leonie asked then.

"Jolley knocked him off," said the detective. "Somewhere in Ohio. He was on the lam from a holdup that backfired and Weaver picked him up. He got Weaver talking, saw that they were the same general type physically and killed him. Then he came on with Weaver's papers and stuff."

"If he hadn't tried to run me down last night, he'd have got away with it," said Wilfred thoughtfully.

THE detective shook his head.

"Not likely," Venner stated. "He slipped when he made that gesture toward a vanished mustache, and when you imitated it, he got scared. He hadn't intended to murder Gorman by his own account—but when he saw that half million slipping away he lost his head.

"He knew I'd keep making you reenact the scene over and over again and that it was an odds-on chance someone would dope out his gesture and put a mustache on his face just in case. And he knew he was sunk then. So he had to do what he did. He was just unlucky, that's all."

"Praise Allah!" said Leonie, hugging Wilfred's arm tightly. Venner looked at them and stopped frowning.

"That was a mighty brave thing you did today, Hull," he said. "Even if it was mighty foolish. Our man was right behind Kansas Jolley."

"But we didn't know that," said Wilfred, blushing. He winced as he accepted the big calloused mitt the lieutenant had extended toward him.

They left Headquarters a few minutes later to face a battery of cameramen. Then someone found them a cab and they returned to Wilfred's apartment house. There, in the mailbox, was the letter from the late Orrin S. Gorman whose delayed delivery had made Wilfred a witness to murder.

Leonie stood close beside him in the entryway as he ripped open the envelope and scanned its contents. Wilfred read it, then read it again.

It went, in part:

So there is no question but that, through your paternal grandfather, you are in direct line from the Hull family which played such a part in early American history. However, you are a descendant of Major General, not Captain (later Commodore) Isaac Hull of *Constitution* fame. The latter was a nephew of the former, who served with distinction in the Revolutionary Army.

However, while General Hull attained eminence as a soldier of Washington, he is better known for his activities during the War of 1812 when, as a Major General, he was put in command of the Northwest Territory. There he surrendered Fort Dearborn, the site of modern Detroit, and all other garrisons in the Territory to the British without firing a shot.

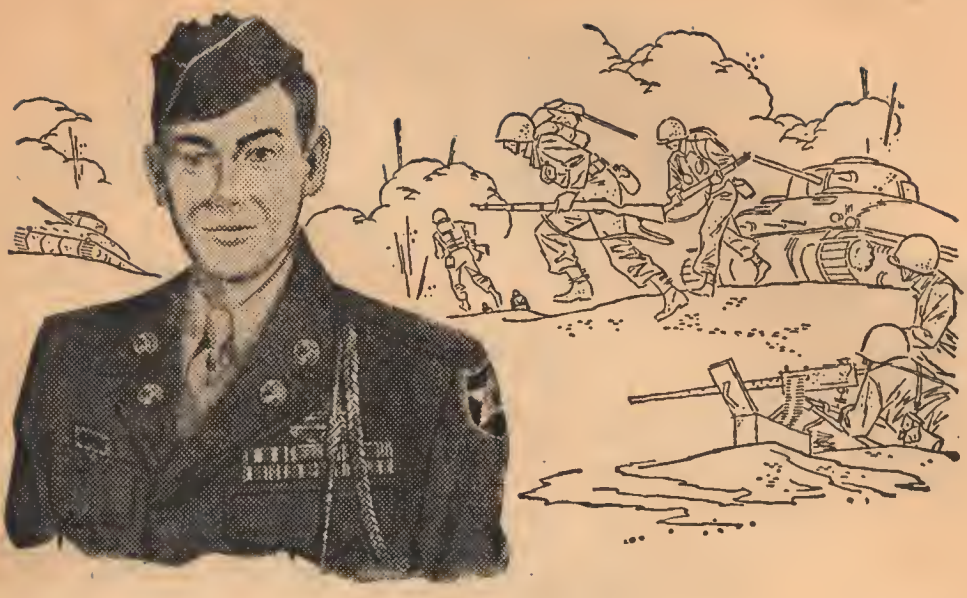
His surrender constituted one of the worst fiascos in the history of American arms. Had Perry not won the battle of Lake Erie some months later, the results would have been disastrous. While bribery and treason were never actually proved, there is every reason to suspect that . . .

Wilfred looked at Leonie, who returned his stare. Then suddenly, both of them burst out laughing.

"Poor Will," she said tenderly. "So *your* Isaac Hull wasn't even the right Isaac Hull."

"Maybe he had a reason for giving up Detroit," said Wilfred. "Maybe his gout was acting up or something." He looked down, discovered that Leonie was in his arms and that he was enjoying her presence there. He felt like a man who had just walked out of a self-imposed prison that had surrounded him all his life.

"That," he said when he had kissed her to their mutual satisfaction, "is the end of ancestors for both of us. We're going to be too busy becoming ancestors ourselves."



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They won that honor in France in 1917 and 1918. For their combat record in World War II, they were awarded a dozen unit citations. Landing in Normandy June 7, 1944, the Second fought at St. Laurent sur Mer and liberated Trevieres. It captured Hill 192 in the vital struggle for St. Lo. It took Tinchebray, then swung south 300 miles to Brest, which surrendered in September. A month later the Second was biting into the Siegfried Line, and in January, 1945, it was in the thick of the Battle of the Bulge. Two key German towns, Monschau and Ahrweller, were taken in February and March, and by V-E Day the division had driven all the way to Czechoslovakia.

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CAREERS WITH A FUTURE

U. S. Army and U. S. Air Force

WALK SOFTLY, DEATH

A jail cell held the answer to the murder of Vic's policeman father, and the price of learning it would be—Vic's own life!

CHAPTER I

Into the Dark

THE Police Academy stank of liniment and sweat, leather and rubber. They'd set up long rows of camp chairs facing the platform at the east end of the gym and another, single row on the platform. Most of the young men who filled the chairs, lean and eager in their brand new uniforms, listened attentively to the high-sounding phrases that the Mayor was mouthing, but Vic Dunn let them slide past his ears only half heard.

His dark eyes somber in his narrow bony face, Vic looked at the row of the Department's top brass seated on the platform. The Commissioner. Chief Burnham. The captains who headed the Headquarters squads. But one man who should have been up there was missing. . . .

"And no one regrets more than I," the Mayor was saying, "that he is not here to pin on his son's breast the badge he himself wore so long and with so much honor. I give you, as a symbol of the selfless service to which you dedicate yourselves today—Captain John Dunn, slain in the performance of his duty."

Vic's hand moved to his breast pocket. Under the harsh fabric he could feel the

a novelet by ARTHUR LEO ZAGAT

Rifles held taut across their bodies, the guards hurried into the grass, pursuing Vic

letter which he had first read in a billet overlooking the *Via Corso*.

This is the last letter I'll be writing you, son. It's going to be swell to talk over my puzzles with you again, like we used to.

I've been struggling with one tough case this past year, but just today I turned up something. On second thought I'll save telling about it until you get back. I hope it's soon.

Vic Dunn made it as quick as the Army's slow-grinding mills would allow, but it hadn't been quick enough. His father had been slain in the performance of his duty, by a shot out of a dark alley, the very night this letter was postmarked. There was another paragraph in it:

What's this tomfoolishness about your not coming on the Force because your college education would be wasted on police work? That's the bunk. It might have made sense back when I started pounding pavement, but not in these days. . . .

CLATTERING applause brought Vic back to the gym.

The Mayor had finished, was stepping back from the lectern, and Chief Burnham, white-haired, hawk-nosed, came forward.

"Rise!" he barked.

Vic Dunn was one of ninety who sprang up and to attention as a single unit.

"Raise your right hands and repeat after me the following oath. . . ."

"I, Vincent Dunn, do swear faithfully to support. . . ."

Then he was one on a long blue line moving to the platform and up on it. The Mayor's bald pate was level with Vic's chin as he pinned on the shining badge, mumbling congratulations.

"Thank you, sir." Vic said.

Commissioner Carlin's eyes were dead marbles in bags of loose skin, his hand limp.

"Congratulations."

"Thank you, sir."

The line moved haltingly past gold-braided uniforms and more handshakes, more mechanical thank yous. The last in the row was Dan Staine, captain's bars on his collar, his hair iron gray above a gaunt, finely netted face. Otherwise he was the same as when he would stand chatting with John Dunn where their beats met and a tow-headed lad stood by, adoring.

Staine said nothing but Vic's fingers still ached from his grip when the blue line carried him down off the platform and along the gym wall to a desk where a clerk handed each man a slip of paper. The line broke as friends looked for one another to compare the assignments marked on the slips, but no one looked for Vic and Vic looked for no one.

He stood mask-faced, blood pounding in his temples, as he stared down at the slip the clerk had handed him, at the single, incredible word which was under his name:

RESERVE

It meant—no assignment. It meant—go home and wait till we send for you. It meant—you made a poor probation. You just squeezed by.

That was a lie. Maybe he hadn't showed up as best of the class but he certainly hadn't been anywhere near the worst. Someone had fouled up the detail. First thing tomorrow he'd go down to Central Office and get it straightened out.

Meantime, there was nowhere to go but home—two rooms and a kitchenette that seemed even more desolate than when he'd returned to them a year ago.

When he got there, Vic stripped off his new uniform and hung it in the bedroom wardrobe, next to the worn and wrinkled one with gold-encrusted sleeves and a bullet-hole in its breast. He reached for a pair of gray slacks—then twisted about startled, as a phone rang in the outer room. It was the first time that bell had rung in months.

HE PADDED out to the instrument, plucked it from its cradle.

"Yes?"

"Patrolman Dunn?"

"Correct, sir."

"You know who this is?"

"Certainly. You're—"

"Cut it," the recognized voice snapped. "Don't say my name, just listen. I want you at my house tomorrow night at one A.M. sharp. The back door. Don't shave from now on, wear your oldest cits, stripped of identification. Make sure no one knows where you're going and no one sees you come here. Understand?"

"I understand, sir."

But, hanging up. Vic understood only that Captain Dan Staine had given him an extraordinary invitation. An order, rather. His tone had made that clear.

He padded back to the bedroom. In the closet he found the assignment slip in the uniform's side pocket where he'd thrust it.

He tore the slip across and across, and across again.

THE dim, deserted street seemed far narrower than Vic Dunn recalled it out of childhood memory. The block of two-story brick houses was shorter and dingier.

All the houses were exactly alike. No light showed from them and the driveways between them were black. But as Vic plodded past the third house from the corner his furtive sideward glance caught the red spark of a cigar's tip within an open first floor window and the blob of a face.

Why should Captain Staine be waiting for him in the dark?

The thrum of a powerful motor grew louder ahead. The car that came toward Vic was a low-slung convertible, cream-colored in the pale glow of a street lamp. As it passed him, he made out only that it had two occupants. The car slowed behind him, as if to stop at the Staine house, then resumed speed. Vic turned just in time to see the vehicle slide around the corner.

The street was empty again. Vic darted into the down-slanting alley between the fifth and sixth houses, reached its inner end and then paused, peering out.

Fifteen years had changed nothing here either. The wide concrete space between the rear of the houses and the line of garages facing them still was uncrossed by fences. Short wooden flights still dropped from shadowy back doors and battered cans were set out awaiting the morning collection.

In motion again, Vic kept as close to the walls as the cans would permit. Even though the windows above him were dark, some sleepless person might look out and see him.

He passed the fifth house, was passing the fourth, when he spotted the shadow crouched against the wall of the third house.

Staine?

Staine hardly would be furtively sliding open a basement window of his own home. Sucking in his cheeks, Vic sneaked as soundlessly as possible across the intervening space. He clamped his right hand on the prowler's right elbow from behind, and slid his left in under the fellow's left armpit to come up and back again behind the neck for an unbreakable hold.

"Gotcha," he grunted.

But then he let his grip go lax. For suddenly he realized he had encountered rounded, feminine softness. In that shocked instant, the captive twisted free and darted away.

VIC recovered, leaped after the fleeting shadow. He cracked his shins on an unseen garbage can. Its cover was still clattering when he reached the driveway alongside Staine's house, but the alley was empty.

Vic knew that before he could reach the street, his quarry would have had time to conceal herself in any one of a half-dozen vestibules. To search for her would be futile. Then the sound of a lock clicking turned his head back to Staine's rear door.

A tall shadow emerged from that door and paused on the landing. Vic went back there, up the stairs. He stepped past Captain Staine into a narrow, dim entry that at once went black as the door was closed.

"Why," Captain Staine demanded in a tight, low tone, "didn't you blow a siren and make sure the whole block knows you've arrived? Or are you going to tell me a cat made that racket?"

"No, sir. I did. I caught someone trying to break into your cellar. A woman."

"A woman?" The low voice was startled, but stayed low. "A young woman?"

"I couldn't see." Vic remembered her flower-like fragrance, not like that of any flower he could name. "But she felt young."

"Felt?"

"I grabbed her from behind, but she slipped out and got away."

"Some cop!" Oddly enough, the comment held no rebuke, rather a hint of relief. "All right. Let's go where we can talk."

"But aren't you going to do anything about her?"

"No."

Years in the Army had taught Vic not to argue with a superior. But he was filled as never before, with a premonition that trouble lay ahead.

CHAPTER II

Masquerade

HE ALLOWED Staine to lead him past a staircase, mounting out of a shadowy foyer, into a small dark room at the front of the house that reeked with tobacco despite a half open window.

Staine pulled a black shade down over the window and switched on a light that revealed a leather couch, a deep club chair upholstered in the same worn, brown leather and hollowed to the shape of uncounted buttocks. In one corner was a rolltop desk and a battered swivel armchair.

Obeying his host's gesture, Vic sank into the leather chair, watching Staine settle into the one at the desk. Staine fumbled a cigar out of the box on the littered writing surface and carved the tip.

Back of the cigar box was a photo, framed in tarnished silver, of a sweet-faced woman. The hair was drawn tightly back and the highboned, black-net collar that clasped a proud neck recalled to Vic the face of his own mother.

They'd been friends, his mother and Myra Staine. Both were long gone. The Staines had had a daughter too. Ellen. That was all Vic could remember of her, her name. She'd been about five when Mom had died and he and Dad had moved away to the flat on the other side of the city.

That had been the last Vic had seen of the Staines, the old warmth between John Dunn and Dan Staine had already cooled. Why, Vic wondered now. Was it because his father had been promoted to lieutenant while Staine remained a sergeant? Did the caste system banning intimacy between officer and non-com also prevail on the police force?

Staine wheeled in his chair, his cigar drawing to his satisfaction, and studied Vic's face.

"Curious to know what this is all about, Dunn?"

"Naturally."

"Well, the first thing I've got to tell you is that while, as far as anyone in the Department or out of it knows, you're unassigned, actually you're on my squad."

Vic's pulse jumped. Staine's squad was Gambling and Narcotics, and a cop wasn't put on that till he'd amply proved himself.

"Don't run away with the idea," Staine quickly added "that I picked you because you're John's son. If anything, that was against you. I needed a man who hadn't been seen all over town in police uniform and who wouldn't be missed if he dropped out of sight, without explanation, for a week or a month. A rookie, in other words, who's got no family, no chums, especially no gal. You're the only one in the batch who fits. Or have I missed something?"

"Not that I know of, sir. I lost touch with the friends I had before I went into the Army. I haven't made any new ones. I take care of my flat myself, so there's no housekeeper to ask questions. I can't think of anyone who'd know, or care, whether I was dead or alive."

"Good." Staine's gnarled fingers drummed on the end of the chair arm. "In this job I have in mind for you, you'll be against a smart bunch—and one that plays for keeps. You could get hurt. But you don't have to do it if you don't want to."

"You know the answer to that, Captain."

"Sure, but I had to say it. Okay, here's the setup. About two years ago—"

Staine stopped, twisted toward a whisper of sound in the hallway. Then a girl appeared in the door, her dark hair framing an oval, pert-featured face. Her drowsy, blue eyes widened as she caught sight of Vic.

"Oh-h-h," she gasped. "I'm sorry."

She started to turn away, but Staine's rasped, "What's wrong, Ellen?" pulled her back. "Why are you awake?"

"Some noise out in the yard woke me and I couldn't fall asleep. Then I heard someone moving around down here."

She must be twenty, Vic figured. But she seemed much younger standing there in bare feet.

"I—I was frightened," she said. "I tried to tell myself it was nothing, just the house whispering to itself like it does late at night, but it wasn't any good, and I finally got up and went to your room to tell you and you weren't there. Then I saw light down here, so I came down."

"To tell your old man it was time for him to turn in?" There was affection in Staine's voice, but something else too—a reserve. "Look here, Ellen." Now it was very stern. "I want you to forget you saw anyone here tonight. I want you to be sure to say nothing about it to anyone. Understand?"

"Yes, father." Her voice was demure. "I understand." Her blue eyes slid back to Vic. "I'll be careful."

She couldn't have any idea who he was, Vic knew. Even if the thirty hours' stubble on his face hadn't masked it effectively, she hadn't seen him since he was eight and she only five.

"Please come up to bed soon, father. You need your rest."

"I'll be up as soon as I can. Good night, puss."

"Good night."

STAINE'S look stayed on the doorway from which she'd vanished, and Vic was glad of that. For through the tobacco reek he'd caught the fragrance of that flower he could not name, and which he'd smelled a short while before, out in the yard.

Perfume was sold by the hundreds of bottles in dozens of shops, he reminded himself. It added up to nothing that two girls used the same scent, particularly a new and therefore popular one.

"As I was saying, Dunn," the captain resumed, "We're up against a tough outfit. No one has ever succeeded, no one will ever succeed in completely cleaning up the illicit sale of narcotics. It can, however, be held to a negligible minimum except for sporadic flare-ups that invariably are traced to an organized gang. Ordinarily it's easy enough to quell these flare-ups by picking up a few peddlers and backtracking from them to the heads of the gang. Some time ago it became evident that such a mob was operating, but with a difference. Nearly two years have gone by and we haven't got to first base against them."

"You mean you haven't nabbed their sellers?"

"We've pulled in a half-dozen," Staine growled. "They're addicts themselves, as per usual, but holding out the stuff from them to make them sing has netted us exactly nothing. Either they don't know their sources, or they're being slipped their snow—cocaine—right in their cells. That would seem screwy, too, except for one thing. On three occasions we've sent out good cops to try and wangle into the mob. Each time—" Staine drew the edge of his hand across his corded throat. "So quick," he added, as a chill prickled Vic's spine, "that the only answer is someone on the force, maybe on the Narcotics Squad itself, tipped the mob off about them."

"That's why you're so determined no one should know you're putting me out to try the same stunt?"

"That's why, except that I'm switching the angle." Smoke trickled from his thin, grim lips. "We know the junk's being peddled in the City Workhouse. If we can find out how it's getting in there—"

"We can backtrack to the main mob," Vic broke in, eagerly. "So I'm going in there undercover to find out. Which is the reason for the old cits and the no shave."

"Right." The older man nodded. "A little dirt on you and you'll make a first-class bum, except for that belt and those good shoes. I've got an old trunk strap will do for the one, and a pair of shoes I use fixing the furnace ought to get on you with room to spare. Getting you into the Workhouse is easy enough. The hard part will begin once you're in. We can't trust anyone to help you, not even the warden. You'll be on your own."

Excitement leaped in Vic's veins, but he kept it out of his voice. "I'll manage."

"You'd better."

Twenty minutes later, in the dark back entry of the house, Captain Dan Staine reached for the door to let Vic out.

"Hold it a minute," Vic said. "There's one thing more I need to know."

"What's that?"

"My father was head of the squad, wasn't he? They made you a captain and gave you the squad after he died. That was about a year ago, and this drug mob's been operating almost two."

"Right."

"Then—" Anger clogged Vic's throat momentarily. "Then I want to know what you meant when you said my being his son was against my being picked for this job. What were you hinting at?"

"You young idiot!" Staine's hand gripped Vic's forearm, fingers digging in. "There's one thing you've still got to learn. That a cop's judgment, like a doctor's, is apt to be warped if his emo-

tions get tangled up in a case."

"His emotions?"

"Like love. Or hate."

Hate? John Dunn had written, *I've been struggling with one tough case this past year, but just today I turned up something.* . . . And that night he had been ambushed.

"I understand, sir," Vic murmured. "I'll watch myself."

"See that you do." Dan Staine's hand dropped away. The knob rattled and the door opened.

VIC DUNN watched the crabbed hand move a pen across the ruled sheet. The desktop was ruled too, by the long, thin shadows of the iron bars that caged the window through whose crust of dirt the gray afternoon light seeped.

"Name?"

"Nudd. Joe Nudd. N-u-d-d."

"Home address?"

"Allen's Alley."

The gray head didn't look up, but the tired monotone said, "Look, bud. You're gonna be in this coop thirty days. You can make it easy for yourself or you can make it tough, an' crackin' wise is one way to make it tough. What's your home address?"

"Put down Pleasant River, Nebraska." Vic knuckled the desktop, bending his elbows to bring his head down nearer to the gray one. "You sound like a right guy." It couldn't be heard two feet away. "Tip me to the cock o' the roost here."

The hand pulled over the list the patrolman from the Black Maria had turned in. *Drunk and disorderly,* the hand wrote.

Vic belched the dead-cat taste of "block an' fall" whiskey (you drink a shot, walk a block an' fall), felt the dull ache at the back of his skull where a nightstick had thudded.

No visible means of support. The pen stopped there, as if pointing.

"I got what it takes," Vic murmured. "The bones were good to me last night, and what they gave me's ditched where no bull nor no screw'll spot it."

"Okay." It was the same lipless undertone Vic had used, far more secret than a whisper. "You'll be contacted." And aloud, "That's all, Nudd. The door on the right. Next."

Vic shambled through the stench of disinfectant, the sour smell of unwashed bodies, to the indicated door. A turnkey opened it, and it passed him into a larger room lined with open-faced cubicles in which men were stripping.

Vic smelled steam, the pungent sting of strong soap, heard the sound of rushing water. This was good. This was what he needed, to scrub away the stink of the water-front dive, the crawling itch of the Stockade in the Police Court basement, the stink and itch of the Black Maria that had brought him here.

The city couldn't afford to clothe its transient guests. After your bath and a shave that left your skin raw, and after a rough-handed doctor had invaded your ultimate privacies, you received back the clothes you'd come in and put them back on, hot from the delouser. Then a blue-jowled guard, someone called Josh, conducted a half-dozen of you down a long corridor and up a flight of rutted stone steps.

Josh stopped on the first landing and sent the others in through a door where another keeper took them over. But he motioned to Vic to climb another flight. They went through a similar door there and when Vic saw that the iron cots lining the walls of the big, sun-flooded dormitory had mattresses in addition to the drab blankets he'd seen folded at the ends of naked springs in the dim room below, he knew that the word he'd dropped at the reception desk already had been passed back.

"That's your bunk," the keeper said, jabbing a thumb toward one midway of the wall. "The latrine's down there." The thumb indicated a closed door at the rear of the room.

"Where's everybody?" Vic asked.

"In the shops," Josh replied. "You'll get your assignment in the morning. If you smoke in here, keep your butts off the floor."

"Suppose you ain't got anything to smoke?"

"Canteen in the mess hall sells cigarettes before and after chow."

"And if it's something else beside smokin' you need, what then?"

Josh's brutish face went blank. "I wouldn't know, mister."

He turned, and, plodding out of the room, started down the stairs. Vic shrugged, went past battered tables and unpainted chairs that ranged the room's center.

The door at the rear hung on spring hinges and it was so warped that almost

an inch of light showed between its vertical edge and the jamb. Through this slit sound came, a thud, a rasped oath, a thin and terrified squeal.

"No, Matt. No. I didn't go to slop yuh."

"That helps." The second voice was low, slow, but it held an undertone of cold fury. "That takes the muck off my pants." His eye to the slit, Vic saw a man in a brown suit viciously gripping the shoulder of a weazened little man whose face was big-pupiled, and blue-lipped.

"No," the little man squealed again, as the brown shoulders hunched and the hand came up, flat palmed and driving edgewise for the old man's Adam's apple.

Vic thrust the door open and it hit the man in brown hard. Following the door through he saw the man had been knocked against the sidewall.

"Gee," he exclaimed, wide-eyed. "Gee, pal, I'm sorry."

"Sorry!" The fellow snarled and leaped for Vic.

CHAPTER III

Snow Bird

THEN Vic stepped to meet him. He grabbed a wrist in a steel clutch and pulled it back and up behind twisting shoulder blades.

"Easy," he drawled to the back of the man's blond head. "Take it easy, fellah, or you'll bust a gasket."

His captive made no effort to break the hold. It would have snapped his arm if he had. Beyond him, amazement and an unholy joy were replacing the terror in the old man's rheumy eyes.

"Beat it," Vic growled at the oldster. "Take a powder." And then, when the old fellow had shambled out with his mop and pail, Vic spoke again to the man in brown. "What's the idea jumping me? You figure I could see through that door?"

"No."

"Oh, so you hop every new guy regardless, just to show him you're cock o' this roost and intend to stay that. Well I ain't ambitious, so suppose we leave it at that. What do you say?"

"Suits me."

"Swell."

Vic let go and stepped back. The man turned to him. He was almost as tall as Vic, chunkily built, his hair an odd silvery blond and cropped to follow the squarish shape of his head. In a brown rayon sport shirt, wool slacks of a deeper shade of brown, he seemed completely out of place in this galley. Until, that is, one noticed his eyes, the irises almost colorless, the pupils pinpointed.

"My handle's Nudd," Vic said. "Joe Nudd."

"I'm Matt Rawley." He looked down at the dark spatter near one neatly pressed trouser cuff. "That blasted ape! If he slops me again, I'll cripple him." The pale eyes raised to Vic's. "He bumped me while I was getting an earful of what you was asking the screw." And then, with apparent irrelevance, "How's the weather outside?"

"The weather?" A muscle knotted at the point of Vic's jaw. "Well, I'll tell you. It looks like snow, I hope. That's what I go for. Snow."

Rawley let his thin lips relax. "Sleigh-riding comes high—in here."

"How high?"

"Well-ll, if you left a sawbuck under your mattress before you go to chow, it could turn out you was right about the weather. And if I was you I'd put another one with it for luck."

"Luck?"

"You'll need some when they start handing out the jobs to you new birds. Of course—" the blond man shrugged—"if you like stoking furnaces or maybe cleaning latrines like Pop Morse, that's up to you." His thin smile licked his lips again and he shoved out through the door.

Vic watched the door swing back and forth and come to rest. Then he turned away to find a cranny of the washroom where he'd be hidden from anyone else who entered. Here he pulled out of its loops the wide trunk strap Staine had given him to use as a belt, bit off a knot in the stitching along its edge, and separated the leather layers with his thumbnails.

The pocket thus opened revealed, among other things, a couple of grimy tens folded lengthwise. Vic hesitated, decided to extract a pair of fives in-

stead. He replaced the makeshift moneybelt, went back out and across to the cot the keeper had said was his. He spread the blankets, took off his shoes and lay down.

The only sound in the big room was the *thump* of the long-handled brush with which the weazened old man, Pop Morse, was sweeping the floor and the rustle of the magazine Rawley was reading, as he stretched on his own cot in the choice corner between two windows.

Rawley obviously was the kingpin of this domain, the privileged prisoner to whom no rules applied, the contact between those inmates who could pay for favors and the guards who sold them. The important question was whether he was tied directly to the narcotic ring outside the Workhouse or if in this, too, he was merely the go-between for some guard or clique of guards.

The brash way Rawley had opened negotiations indicated that this would not be easy to determine. Rawley was no fool. He had a vile temper, but he'd brought it under control the instant he'd realized the sort of man with whom he had to deal. He was smart and he was dangerous. Well, Vic yawned, there was plenty of time to figure out how to outsmart him.

Weariness welled up in Vic and he closed his eyelids, but somewhere at the blurred edge of sleep a face formed in his thoughts, oval, pert-featured, framed by black ringlets that contrasted oddly with naive blue eyes. Whether Ellen Staine had been the girl at the basement window or not, her father had thought she was. That was why he'd done nothing about investigating.

Something bumped Vic's cot and Vic, opening his eyes, became bemusedly aware of a wrinkled gray head bobbing rhythmically nearby.

It was Pop Morse. The old man was sweeping between the cots. His brush tumbled Vic's shoes.

"Cripes," he mumbled, not looking at Vic. "Cripes these kickers is crummy. What size you wear?"

"Eleven D. But what—?"

"I can rustle you a pair of new ones by tomorrow night."

"I could use 'em." So even this bleared derelict had a racket. "What will they stand me?"

"Not a red. They don't cost me nuttin' an' I owe 'em to yuh for the way you set that snake back on his heels."

Before Vic could protest, the old man was shuffling away, pushing his brush ahead of him.

ODD. Where did he intend to steal the promised footgear? How could he be as sure as he seemed to be of laying hands on the right size? The Workhouse didn't supply clothing, so he couldn't have in mind raiding a storeroom. Maybe there was a shoemaking shop.

There was none, Vic learned at chow, by asking a number of discreet questions of his neighbor in the clattering messhall.

"Then how would a guy get himself some new kicks if he needed 'em?"

Red Neal, squat, broken-nosed, ate a mouthful of greasy stew. "He could get a money order from the office an' write away for 'em. Or mebbe he could get some pal on the outside to buy 'em an' have the store mail 'em to him."

"Why that? Why couldn't his friend mail 'em himself, or bring 'em to him?"

"Because you ain't allowed to get no packages in here unless they're mailed in right from some store or comp'ny or some big place like that. Not even Matt Rawley ain't, that's how strict that rule is."

The dormitory was crowded and noisy when Vic returned to it and went to his cot. Watching his chance, he slid a hand under its mattress unobserved. The two bills he'd left there were gone. In their place were three papers folded as a pharmacist folds his prescription powders. He retired to the washroom's precarious privacy and opened one of the papers.

It contained about as much white powder as would cover two nickels. There were only traces of the glistening flakes that earn for cocaine its designation of snow. He tasted the powder. It was mostly sugar! Yes, 'sleighriding' came high in here. The three decks of this 'cut' stuff he had bought for ten dollars would last even a moderate addict not more than a couple of days.

That suited Vic. Night after next he'd leave another ten in his cot and spot who made the exchange. By that time he would have worked out a way of doing the spotting.

The next morning brought Vic Dunn something else he'd purchased with a

ten—assignment to the Workhouse office. The clerk in charge of this inner room was a horse-faced civilian named Ben Green.

He set Vic to work copying old records onto five-by-eight cards.

From the table where Vic sat he could look out into the larger room where most of the institution's business with the outer world was transacted and where its daily grist of prisoners was admitted.

Through the door he could see a short stretch of cobbled yard, the high granite wall that enclosed the grounds, and the iron-barred gate in the wall with its arched top and sentry boxes.

About six feet within the outer door a meshed metal screen ran across the room from wall to wall. Neither new prisoners, guards nor civilian personnel were permitted to pass through the door in this screen without being searched. Visitors did not penetrate it at all, but were directed to a narrow entry at the side where they conversed with the inmates through another, similar screen and under a keeper's watchful eye.

These precautions, as well as the regulations regarding packages about which Neal had told Vic, were unusually stringent for a municipal house of correction.

Obviously they had been instituted to cope with the illicit introduction of narcotics into the Workhouse.

Yet the drugs were getting in.

THE principal occupation of Ben Green, the clerk in charge of this inner room, seemed to be playing endless games of solitaire. The principal occupation of the three other prisoners, who with Vic inhabited the inner office, seemed to be swapping stories that would have made a marine sergeant blush. Vic tried a couple of the filthiest he knew but they were received with marked unacclaim. He was glad enough to immerse himself in his footless-seeming job of copying the records, and was relieved to discover that one of the advantages of working here was that you were released some twenty minutes before five-thirty, the hour when the other inmates ended their labors.

Vic's co-workers apparently were domiciled elsewhere. He was the only one who climbed the stairs to the top-floor dormitory. Pop Morse met him on the landing, stopped him with a palsied hand.

"How are yuh, boy? Had any trouble?"

"Who'd make me any?"

"That snake Matt Rawley, of course. He ain't forgot what you done to him." Red-rimmed eyes peered fearfully down the stairs. "Nor I ain't neither. The shoes are on the floor of my closet back there." His eyes shifted to a hitherto-unnoticed door at the rear of the landing. "But don't let him know I give them to you."

Before Vic could answer, the old man had turned away and was scuttling down the stairs.

The closet had a stench of foul rags and rancid soap powder. Holding his breath, Vic fumbled among brooms, wet mops, grease-smeared pails, and brought up a pair of black oxfords still gleaming with their original factory polish.

"Pretty neat," remarked someone behind him and he wheeled to it. Matt Rawley stood there. "What are they?" Rawley asked. "Jon Maclins?"

Vic turned the shoes over and stared at the familiar trademark of the "plant to wearer" chain whose shops were almost as plentiful in the city as gas stations.

"Yeah. They're Maclins."

"What did Pop soak you for them?"

Pop had warned him not to let Rawley know the source of those shoes, but caught taking them out of Pop's closet, Vic couldn't very well deny their origin.

"Twelve bucks," Vic said, recalling that Maclin's single price was five-ninety-five, "Did I get stuck?"

"You didn't get no bargain." Rawley's pale eyes were expressionless, but muscles moved in his sallow cheeks. "Next time you want anything like that, ask me."

The flat tone gave no clue as to whether Rawley intended this as an offer or a warning.

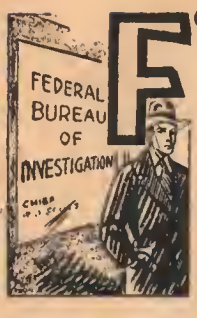
"Thanks, Matt," Vic grinned, choosing to take it as an offer. "I'll remember." And then, "Look. There's a couple or two things around this dump I'd like you to wise me up about. How's for our chewing the fat while I get into these new kickers?"

"Some other time, pal," the blond man murmured. "Just now I got to see a man about a rat."

Matt Rawley's feet made no sound, descending the stairs.

CHAPTER IV

Corpse Candidate



FOUR years of war had endowed Vic Dunn with the ability to wake, completely alert, at any predetermined instant. He opened his eyes now to moonglow, striped by the shadow of bars, to foul air, to choked snores and whimperings that were somehow less human than bestial.

Lying motionless, he examined the cots that stretched to the room's rear, the mounded, dark forms on the cots across the room. Satisfied, at last, that no one else was awake he rolled over, as if in restless sleep, and inspected the other side of the dormitory. He peered with special intentness at Rawley's bed. After a long while, he slid out from under his blanket and padded swiftly out to the stair landing.

The moon did not reach here, and there was no other light, so Vic trailed fingers along the dormitory wall. He managed to find the closet door, which he'd left not quite closed so that he'd have no need to turn its knob.

He could not, however, keep its hinges from rasping. But in a breath-locked instant of listening he heard only the low, barely perceptible rumble of the city night and an unbroken chorus of snores.

Grasping a wire he had worked loose form his cot spring, he reached through a tangle of broom and mop handles to the wall, which was the wall separating the closet from the dormitory. The wire found a crack in the wall, slid between mouldering laths, bit at old plaster.

When Vic shut the door again, a pinpoint of moonlight starred the cupboard's black back wall. In a line with that tiny hole was the cot to which someone would come, tomorrow evening, to exchange three decks of cut cocaine for a ten dollar bill. . . .

The next day, Vic continued at his job of copying records. The same sour, dusty smell lay heavy in the office. The same yellow ledger pages were brittle under his hand. Ben Green, the clerk, played the same interminable solitaire on his desk. Dink Marvin, Rod Landers, and Shorty Allison mumbled their leering yarns, not quite the same but no more appetizing.

At about ten, Dink Marvin went into the outer office, to a phone booth there. No one tried to stop him. No one made any attempt to listen in on him.

That, Vic thought, was pretty nice. When he was ready to leave there all he'd have to do would be to call Dan Staine and get him to spring him.

Marvin came out of the booth, slouched toward the reception desk, and was hidden by the intervening wall. Vic finished a card, took another from the pile of blank ones, turned a page of the big book from which he was copying police records. Suddenly, his name, Dunn, leaped out at him from the grimy page.

But it was not quite his name, 'Ptrlmn. John Dunn, arresting officer', it read. He looked for the date. "Hey, Ben!" Marvin exclaimed, his voice interrupting. "D'juh hear about Pop Morse?"

"Yeah," Green grunted. "I heard."

"Whyncha tell us?"

The horse-faced clerk put a red card on a black one, counted off three from the deck in his hand.

"Why should I? You bums is all alike to me. One goes, another—"

"What about Morse?" Vic broke in. "What's happened to the old man?"

Green looked around at him, face muscles tightening.

"What's it to you?"

Vic came up out of his chair. "What happened to Pop Morse?" he repeated, huskily. He took a stiff-kneed step toward Green. "I want to know."

"Okay, okay, you don't have to get het up about it. He was found in the alley behind the kitchen this morning."

"Found?" *I got to see a man about a rat*, Matt had said. "Dead?"

"You'd be dead too if you took a tumble like that."

"Like what?"

"Twenty feet to concrete, from that ledge that runs back of the mailroom windows. Back of his skull was busted in and his neck was broke. Way they figure it, he crawled out on that ledge during mess and tried to snare something out of the mailroom between the bars. They say he was killed right off, even though nobody found him till they started changing guards, midnight."

"But he was right behind the kitchen,

you said. Didn't anyone hear him fall? Or yell?"

"Nope. Guess he was too scared to yell, slipping off like that."

Vic pulled in breath. "Or—maybe he didn't slip off. Maybe he didn't fall."

He knew it was a mistake as soon as he'd said it. The others stiffened.

Ben Green growled, "Just what do you mean by that, *Mister* Nudd?"

"Nothing." He twisted his lips into an apologetic grin. "I guess I just got knocked off my trolley for a second." He was here to do just one job, he had no right to let anything interfere with it. "I kind of liked the old goof, even if he was crummy."

"Crummy's right," Dink Marvin agreed. "I heard he hadda puts rocks on his blankets to keep 'em from walkin' away."

The laugh Marvin's remark brought eased the tension and Vic made himself join in it, but returning to his work, he thought of what Captain Staine had told him. A cop's judgment was apt to be warped if his emotions got tangled up in a case. The very first chance he'd had, he'd proved Staine right.

DISCOUNTING Rawley's sinister-sounding remark, Morse's death well might be the accident the authorities had pronounced it. The mailroom was where the old man had procured the shoes Vic had on his feet. He apparently was in the habit of stealing from the mailroom, and had tried it once too often.

But how had he been so certain he could supply Vic's exact size?

Vic made himself stop thinking about it. Whether Morse had died or been murdered, it had nothing to do with his mission. That mission was coming to a head tonight when, hidden in the broom closet, he would spot through the peephole in the dormitory wall whoever it was that made delivery of the 'snow' he had ordered from Rawley this morning. That would be at suppertime. But he'd have to lay the groundwork for his absence from the mess hall, so he could hide in the broom closet.

Lunch, slices of a leathery substance that posed as ham, soggy bread, and a tepid liquid that was supposed to be coffee, gave Vic a chance to expound in precise and picturesque detail what 'these here slops' were doing to his digestive system.

"If I ain't feelin' no better by tonight," he announced, "I'm gonna pass up chow. I'd rather have an empty stomach than put any more of this poison in it."

Back in the office there were more cards, more yellowed pages. Along about mid-afternoon, there came a sharp whisper from the outer room.

"Watch it, Ben! Company."

By the time Vic looked up, Ben Green had swept his cards from the desk and was busy filling in some form.

"That's only our file and record room," a deep-chested voice said, just outside. "Nothing to interest you."

"But I want to see absolutely everything, Warden Johnson." That voice, lilting and youthful, was somehow familiar. "I'm sure you don't mind."

The owner of the voice was through the doorway then, and stopped just within the threshold. She was long-limbed, slender, her head canted in the silver-gray fur of her jacket's collar. It was Ellen Staine. Her dark hair was windblown, her eyes a deeper blue than when Vic had last seen them blurred with drowse. Those eyes found him, passed on—came back. Ellen Staine's brow puckered and her dusky lips parted. But a voice interrupted. "Come on, kid. You're wasting time." The man whose impatient exclamation forestalled what Ellen had been about to say was about thirty, his mouth sensuous. "I want you to see the shops before they close down."

"And the cells too, Tom. I especially want the warden to show us the cells."

"There are none, Miss Stone," the warden said. "We've dormitories here." He was portly and pompous. "And I'm sorry but our rules do not permit the dormitories to be visited."

Tom laughed. "Rules be hanged, George. You make them and you can break them."

His hand urged Ellen out of the room and Vic relaxed, listening to his voice trail away.

"You needn't bother sending anyone with us. I know my way around this joint. . . ."

That had been close, much too close for comfort.

"Some babe," Shorty Allison was murmuring. "What wouldn't I give for a chance to—"

"Who's the gink with her?" Vic said. "He acts like he owns the dump and the

warden thrown in. Who does he think he is?"

"Search me," Shorty shrugged. "How about it, Ben? You know him?"

"I've seen him around." Ben Green fumbled in the drawer into which he'd thrown his cards, and brought them out again. "How's about you birds layin' off the yakatayakata an' doin' some work in here for a change?"

"Aw, keep your socks on," Dink growled. "So you don't know who the gink is, so what?"

But Vic wondered if this were the real reason for the horse-faced clerk's reticence. And, gazing blankly out the doorway where Ellen had stood for a pulse-stopping instant, he wondered about the warden's calling her "Miss Stone." It sounded, to be sure, very much like "Staine," and the error was natural enough—except that Warden Johnson should be too familiar with the veteran police officer's name to make the error.

Had the girl been introduced to him as Miss Stone? If so, why?

The outer door opened. Past a shawled woman who peered in, uncertain, timorous, Vic glimpsed a car parked just within the wall's iron gate, a low-slung, cream colored convertible. It could be—it undoubtedly was—the same car that had passed him two nights ago, slowed as if about to stop at the Staine house but picked up speed and purred around the corner.

THE car must have stopped that night where the long, unfenced stretch of backyards opened into the sidestreet. It must have dropped Ellen off and she'd darted to a basement window of her own home, to enter that way, so that the father, whose cigar she'd seen glowing in the room facing the street, would not know she was returning. Ellen didn't want him to know she'd been out with the semi-criminal, the cheap politician he'd forbidden her to see.

She had not deceived Dan Staine, but he'd chosen to let her think she had. Well, Vic told himself, that was of even less concern to him than Pop Morse's misadventure. Ellen would not, he felt sure, betray him. Nevertheless, an inexplicable dull depression settled down on him, rode him the rest of the afternoon. When work was done, he hurried up to the dormitory.

He would have plenty of time, Vic figured, to deposit under his mattress the ten he'd extracted from his trunk-strap moneybelt and conceal himself in the broom closet before his dormitory mates showed up. The only trouble with that plan was that, as he turned from his cot, Matt Rawley entered and called to him.

Vic's face muscles tightened, but by the time he'd reached the blond man he'd contrived a smile.

"Hi, Matt. What's up?"

"I hear you been griping about the grub."

"You don't miss much, do you?"

"Nope." The corner of Rawley's thin mouth moved, as if in a one-sided smile. "Is it worth a fin to you to eat decent the rest of the week?"

"Guess so."

"Gimme."

Vic dug a five out of his pocket, handed it over. Rawley ran a palm over his hair.

"Okay," he said. "I'm washing up and then we'll go down. You're eating with me."

He was stuck. He couldn't get out of this in any way that would not awaken the suspicions of even a moron.

Following the blond man downstairs and across the filling mess hall, he found himself at a table near the entrance to the kitchen.

The food was about the quality served in a roadside diner, and so was infinitely superior to what was being handed out at the other tables. Two men Vic hadn't noticed around before shared it with them. Carl Tarr, tall, cadaverous, with a pickpocket's eel-like fingers and the habit of looking anywhere but at what those fingers were doing. Joe Grant, squat, broad-shouldered, his nose flattened, his ears shapeless lobes.

Their conversation consisted of grunted demands for salt, bread, and the sickly amber salve that passed for butter. Vic considered making some excuse to leave the table, gave up the idea. He joined Rawley in a second cup of coffee—real coffee—and returned to the dormitory with the blond man still beside him. He watched a hot round of stud, yawned, drifted to his cot and sat down on its edge.

He slid his fingers under the head of the mattress, touched paper. The paper wasn't folded. He drew it out, cupped

in his hand, and glanced down at it. It was his own ten dollar bill.

It seemed to Vic that the big room had suddenly hushed, that everyone in it was watching him. He forced himself to look at them.

But no one was paying any attention to him, not even Matt Rawley, banking a game of twenty-one at the last table, near the washroom door.

Rawley, apparently, had forgotten to pass along his order. Or it could mean that there had been some other slip-up which had nothing to do with Vic's being what he was. The one thing he could not afford to do was ignore it. That would be sure to arouse suspicion. Or confirm suspicions that were already aroused.

HE ROSE, ambled out into the aisle and down toward the blond man.

"Nudd!" someone called, hoarsely, from behind Vic. "Joe Nudd."

Vic stopped, turned, and saw the blue-jowled keeper who'd originally brought him here, the one called Josh.

"Okay, Nudd," Josh said. "Get your stuff."

"What stuff? What I own, I got on me."

"Come along then. We're moving you to another dorm."

Was Staine pulling him out of here? Or—?

"What's the big idea?"

"Orders. Get going."

Vic went ahead of the guard, out to the landing, and down two flights of stairs. He turned left into the dim, empty corridor, but Josh stopped him.

"This way, Nudd," Josh said. "We're going across the yard."

The keeper unlocked the heavy oak door opposite the foot of the stairs, pulled it open, and Vic stepped outside.

He heard the door thud shut, and then wheeled at a curious, crunching sound.

The keeper was falling, limp as a sack. Carl Tarr stood over him, a stubby blackjack dangling from his hand. An arm grabbed Vic from behind, clamped on his throat and dragged him back, bending his spine over a knee that jabbed into his kidneys.

"Easy, Joe," Tarr murmured. "Take it easy or you'll snap his backbone. That ain't the kind of mark we want showin' on a corpse."

CHAPTER V

Failure

CHOKING, helpless, Vic Dunn watched Carl Tarr come closer.

"The way it will look, copper," Tarr said, "is that you conked the screw, tried for a powder over the wall, missed, an' come down with a crack that spilled your brains."

His long arm rose, paused to measure the blow of the blackjack dangling from his pallid fingers.

Vic grabbed for the man who was holding him from behind. Getting a hold, he kicked out with both feet at Tarr in front of him. The blow caught Tarr in the midriff. At that instant Vic jerked back his head against the top of Grant's skull.

The throttling arm released Vic and he fell. But he twisted up immediately. The man who had grabbed him from behind was Joe Grant, the pugilist. Vic let fly a fist at his fat-layered solar plexus, straightened him with a short-armed jolt to the jaw. Then he swung about toward Tarr.

He needn't have bothered. Tarr was sliding down along the door to which Vic's kick had hurled him, his hands convulsively pressed to his abdomen, his face frozen in agony.

Joe Grant, too, was down. Down and out.

Vic snatched up the blackjack that had fallen near his feet. Darting around the corner of the building out of which he'd stepped into a death trap, he headed across an open space to the looming barrier that closed the yard.

It had been the instinct, the habit and training accumulated in a dozen commando raids that had saved him. But he knew his swift and silent victory did not mean that he'd cleared the way to go on with his mission but that his mission had ended in failure. Tarr had called him "copper." He was known to be a police agent. He could accomplish nothing more here.

All he had found out was something his antagonists did not bother to hide, that Matt Rawley was the contact man for the dope ring. He didn't know even

whether Rawley was part of the main ring. Nor had he uncovered the slightest hint of how the drugs entered the Workhouse. He'd failed completely and if he didn't get out of here, at once, there would almost certainly be another attempt on his life.

He could, of course, raise the alarm, tell what had happened, reveal to the prison authorities that he'd come in here secretly, without the warden's knowledge or consent. But that would tip off Warden Johnson that he was mistrusted by the police. If the warden was in any way involved with the mobsters it would send him—and them—to cover. He had no way of contacting Staine, the office was closed, and he could not reach the phone booth there. What was that Tarr had said? "The way it will look is that you tried for a powder over the wall."

Could that mean that there was a way to get over the wall unseen? Was that the way the cocaine was smuggled in?

Vic turned to study the forbidding barrier in whose shadow he crouched.

The ancient mortar had crumbled out from between the wall's granite blocks, had left finger- and toeholds amply sufficient for one who'd climbed the smooth concrete of a Siegfried Line bastion under fire. Yes, he guessed he could reach the top all right.

But there he would come into the bright beams that were laid along the top of the wall from boothlike shelters at each corner. Not so much as a rat could cross through that brilliance if the guards were alert. Were they? The sentry boxes themselves were dark. Vic grunted, and abruptly moved along the wall toward the nearest corner.

He reached it and almost without pause started climbing. Behind him, somewhere, someone shouted and there was a sound of running feet. Vic gained the wall's summit, hung there precariously, his eyes just above the capstone.

The floodlight lamps, he saw now, were bracketed to the sides of the sentry box just below the sills of its wide windows. Beneath those windows, narrow but not too narrow, lay strips of blackest shadow. Squirming across at the foot of a booth, a man could not be seen by its occupants, and would be concealed in darkness from the guards at the next corner.

He pulled himself over the edge. A loud bell exploded above him, was cut off as someone lifted a receiver.

"Yeah," a bored voice drawled, then was taut. Shocked. "The devil you say!"

"What's up, Jim?" another voice asked. "What—?"

"Breakout," the first one snapped, paused, spoke again. "Cap says if we spy him trying to cross—shoot to kill! He's bashed in Josh Rosling's skull and near bumped a couple of prisoners who tried to stop him. He's—" But Vic was too far down the wall's outer face to hear any more.

HE DROPPED off into waist-high, lush grass. Light lashed out to his left, struck out of darkness the lonely side road that curved across untenanted swampland to the Workhouse gate. The light spread toward Vic but he was moving in a swift crawl through the miniature jungle of reeds and rushes, outdistancing it. Once more he was fleeing through the unfriendly night, his nerves and stomach knotted in expectancy of a shout of discovery, a screaming bullet.

Whether someone had stumbled on Tarr and Grant and their victim, or Tarr or Grant had recovered consciousness and raised the alarm, it made little difference. Vic was only one witness to the truth. They were two to swear that it was he who'd slain the guard and knocked them out when they rushed to Josh Rosling's aid. They were convicts, true, and he an officer, but how could he explain why, having witnessed a murder and overcome the killers, he'd fled the scene?

He'd not even have the chance to explain. If he tried to surrender, the guards, panicky, revengeful for the death of a comrade, would obey the order he'd heard repeated, "Shoot to kill."

A new sound started. The prison's whistle was raising the alarm for a murderer, for a man known as Joe Nudd. Vic's only safety was to beat that hunt, to make good his escape. Joe Nudd could vanish then, reappear only when the stage was set for his testimony that would convict Tarr and Grant and Rawley for their killings.

He was, Vic realized, indistinguishable in the weeds. He stood up cautiously and peered back. The Workhouse windows were all ablaze. A searchlight's bright ray lanced from a tower atop the main building and scythed the

blackness. Yellow light abruptly slitted the wall's looming blackness, widened. It was the gate opening. Motor thunder drowned the whistle's ominous hoot and a packed black car surged out onto the road.

It slowed after a hundred feet, dropped a passenger, repeated this twice within the next two hundred feet, then roared out of sight toward Western Boulevard, a half-mile distant. The men it had left behind were clearly outlined by the light behind them as, rifles held taut across their bodies, they hurried into the grass.

The fools, Vic thought. If he had a gun he could pick them off one by one and they'd never know what hit them.

A police car's siren wailed, long-drawn, threatening, from the direction of the boulevard. Another siren wailed fainter, more distant. The net, he knew, was closing in on him. Nevertheless, a queer sense of elation tingled through his veins. This was a game he knew.

The yellow flame of a bomb-flare danced at the edge of Western Boulevard, its light flickering on the low thicket of bushes which lined the wide concrete highway's ditch. Another flare burned at the center of the highway, a third on its opposite shoulder. A green squad car was parked between the line of flares and a signpost ten feet away whose arrow, pointing up a side road, bore the words, CITY WORKHOUSE.

"What gets me, Mart," remarked one of the two uniformed policemen who sat on the squad car's running board, "is why the devil that bozo goes an' bumps a screw just to get out of doin' a thirty-day stretch. He must be nuts."

"Or junked to the eyeballs."

"Junked?"

"Sure. That coop's lousy with the stuff. They say even if a guy ain't a hophead when he gets sent in there, he's sure to come out itchin'. Watch it, Stan. Here comes a truck."

The first speaker stood up and moved out into the roadway, waving a flashlight. The enormous trailer-truck that roared toward him slowed and stopped. From the truck's high cab the driver called down.

"What's up, flatfoot?"

Stan's light hit him in the face. "You pick up a rider anywheres along here?"

"It would cost me my job if I did. 'No riders' the company says and that's me, 'No riders.'"

Mart moved along the truck's side, between it and the ditch, his torchbeam flickering on the truck's transmission shafts, airbrake hose, axles, black struts mossy with grease and road dirt.

"Say, Mac," the driver asked. "What's this all about anyway?"

"Guy broke out of—" Stan cut short at his partner's voice from the trailer's rear.

"How about opening up back here an' giving us a look inside?" his partner was calling. "You don't have to get down, fellow. Just give me the key."

"I ain't got it, copper," the truck driver said. "Looka that sign back there."

Mort's flashbeam hit the brass plaque. It read: THIS TRAILER PROTECTED BY EKCO THIEFPROOF SYSTEM. LOCK AND ALARM UNDER CONTROL OF DRIVER. Mort clicked off the flash.

"Okay, Stan," he called "Let him go."

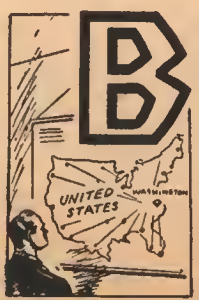
Stan stepped back. "Go on," he said to the driver.

He turned off his own light and the shadow of the trailer was black over the road's ditch and the bushes that lined it. The roar of the tractor's motor covered the rustle of the bushes. Gargantuan wheels turned. Tractor and gigantic trailer surged past the squad car, past the arrow pointing to the Workhouse and pounded on toward the city's center.

Choked by gas fumes, pelted by pebbles from the roadbed, Vic Dunn clung desperately to the grease-blackened struts beneath the trailer's belly.

CHAPTER VI

The Gimmick



ONE-TIRED, Vic sat slumped in the old leather chair in Captain Dan Staine's little room.

"I dropped off when they stopped for a red light on Rand Avenue," he finished, "and dodged here by the back streets." He watched gray smoke trail from Staine's cigar, feed itself into the fog that had filled the room as he talked. "The first piece of luck I've had is not being picked up for a vagrant." He

rubbed at the grease on his trouser knee and added, miserably, "I've sure turned out to be an A-number-one dud."

Staine's wrinkles seemed etched more deeply, but his gray eyes were expressionless.

"Where you went wrong was boring that hole in the back of the broom closet. This Rawley spotted you. He didn't let on, but that was what knocked over the pushcart. He laid for you, and—"

"No," Vic interrupted. "He wouldn't have let me live through the night if he'd known I was a cop. He wouldn't have dared let me hear about Pop Morse's death after he had pulled that line about seeing a man about a rat. Rawley was telling me he was going after the old man, and he couldn't guess I'd let it get by as an accident."

"I'm not so sure it wasn't, Dunn. Why should Rawley go to murder just because Pop Morse was muscling in on one of his rackets? He'd beat him up, maybe, but not kill him. It doesn't make sense."

"No, it doesn't. But—" Vic cut off. "Or maybe it does," he mused. "There's one way it would. That's if these shoes were tied in somehow with the drug traffic. If—" He bent suddenly, tugged at the laces of a mud-clotted oxford. "Hold it. Hold everything. I think I've got a hunch."

The shoe came off. His trembling fingers explored its lining, its sweaty inner sole. He turned it over, tugged at the rubber heel. It came away—too easily.

"And the hunch pays off." Vic came up out of his chair, thrust the shoe at Staine. "Look."

The leather base to which the heel had been attached was a mere shell. It had been carved out to the insole, leaving a rim only just wide enough to hold a single arc of nails.

"There's your answer, sir. That's how the coke's getting into the Workhouse."

A gnarled hand took the shoe from him. "Yeah. Looks like you've got it. They can pack a devil of a lot of snow into a couple of heels hollowed out like this."

"And they probably did the cutting inside, with sugar swiped from the mess hall and ground to a powder." The whole setup suddenly was clear to him, sharply defined. "They only need to mail in a couple of pairs a week, each package addressed to a different inmate. It doesn't matter which inmate because the addressee doesn't know anything about it. Rawley's got someone planted in the mailroom to intercept the gimmicked shoes and dig out the junk."

"And then," Staine took it from there, "he tacks the heels back on and the so-and-sos sell the shoes as a sideline—"

"The devil they do! The heels might come off or wear down to the cavities and somebody'd start asking questions. What they do is cache them somewhere till they can get rid of them, and that—" Vic's eyes were sultry—"is how poor old Pop Morse stuck his neck out. When Rawley caught him giving—or selling—this pair to me he realized the old man had gotten into that cache and he jumped to the conclusion Pop knew a lot more than I think he did."

"So he had him rubbed out, and when you raised a holler about it this morning, he decided he'd better shut you up too."

Wrong, Vic thought. He'd said nothing that would indicate to Rawley he was a policeman. But Ellen had said something to her escort about having seen Vic before, in her father's den, and had been overheard by some accomplice of Rawley's.

"Maybe," he stalled, still reluctant to tell Staine of his daughter's visit to the Workhouse. It would serve no purpose other than to disturb the father and make trouble for the girl. "It doesn't make much difference though, does it? What's important is that this is the break for which you've been waiting two years."

"But you say these shoes are mailed direct from the store."

"From the *Maclin* store, Captain. Rawley knew they were Maclin shoes before he could see them clearly. That means some Maclin clerk's tied in with the mob."

"Hmm." Staine puffed smoke. "Makes sense," he decided. "But we're still not far along. There are fifteen or twenty Maclin shops in the city, and I can't pull a tail on everybody who works in all of them."

"You don't have to, sir. Those chain stores all keep very careful records of everything they sell. They're sure to have records of their insured parcel post shipments. You can put one man on looking over those sheets and when he turns up the one shop that's making a lot of shipments to the Workhouse, you

can concentrate on its employees."

Three perfect smoke rings whirled into nothingness. "Good enough," Staine said. "But you'll have to have an excuse for looking at those sheets, or you'll tip our hand. There's that hatchet murder down in New York. It was spread all over the tabloids this morning. You could say they found a Maclin shoe on the leg they fished out of the Hudson River and we've been asked to trace if it came from here. How's that sound to you?"

Vic grinned happily. "It sounds good."

"That's it, then. You'll get at it in the morning." Dan Staine stubbed out his cigar, pushed erect. "Get that other shoe off. It's evidence. And come on upstairs to clean up. The thing you need now is a decent night's sleep. But the way you look now, you'd never get home. The first harness bull you passed would remember there's a general alarm out for one Joe Nudd and pick you up."

WALKING the three blocks to Rand Avenue, the neighborhood business street along which ran his homeward bus, Vic decided his head felt as though someone were pounding it with a felt-padded hammer, his arms as though invisible weights were suspended from them. Captain Staine was right, he needed sleep. Terribly. He stopped for the bus. The avenue was still noisy with traffic, its sidewalks thronged, its store windows blazing. A jeweler's clock said that it was not quite half past ten.

It must have been about seven then when he'd started down the Workhouse stairs with Josh Rosling. Three and a half hours ago. Yes, a lot of things could happen in two hundred and ten minutes. He ought to know that. He'd seen a hundred men die in a tenth of that time. He'd seen a town won and lost and retaken in an hour.

Where was that bus? He looked up the street for it, blinked at a blaze of blue and scarlet neon halfway up the block. JON MACLIN, it spelled. GOOD SHOES FOR MEN.

A car was just stopping in front of that store. A low-slung, cream-colored convertible. Its door opened and a girl stepped out. She went between two parked cars and across the sidewalk, a package under her arm.

Vic Dunn's brow furrowed. It was not at all extraordinary that Ellen Staine should patronize a shop so near her home. What was strange was that she should enter one where only men's shoes were sold, and that the car which had brought her should not wait, but glide into motion again, merging with the seething traffic stream.

If Vic's exhausted brain had been functioning properly, he might have done it differently. As it was, he simply walked up the block and into the store.

A double row of yellow chairs ran back to back down the center of the carpeted floor between walls solid with shoebox fronts. Two harassed-looking clerks were squatted on their little stools before customers only slightly less harassed. A partition cut across the rear of the store and a slender, skirted figure was just going through its door.

Vic went down along the row of chairs, sank into the one at the very end. The door in the partition had swung half-shut. It was lettered, NO ADMISSION, and in smaller characters at the lower right-hand corner of its frosted-glass half panel, H. FASSET, Manager. A man's voice, meek, tired-sounding, came from behind it.

"Yes, miss. What can I do for you?"

"These shoes." She sounded excited, a little breathless. "A friend of mine bought them here this afternoon for his —for someone in the City Workhouse. But when he took them there he was told they couldn't be accepted unless they were mailed direct from where they were purchased. I wonder if you could possibly—"

"Take care of it for you? Surely. If you'll just let me have the name."

"Morse. Andrew Morse. M-O-R-S-E. In care of—"

"Yes, I know the rest. The postage will be nine cents, and ten for insurance. Nineteen in all, miss."

"I think I've the exact change . . ." Coins clinked. ". . . Eighteen. Nineteen. There you are." Ellen laughed, embarrassedly. "You must think my friend's terribly stupid."

"Oh, not at all, miss. This sort of thing happens all the time. Not so much here but when I was assistant manager of our Morris Street store there was hardly a week went by— Just step this way, please, and I'll write you a receipt. As I was saying, in our Morris . . . "

The voice became only a mumble of sound.

"I'm sorry, sir." One of the clerks had rushed up to Vic, distractedly waving a pair of black oxfords. "I'll be with you in just a minute, but you'll save time if you'll be good enough to take your right shoe off in the meantime." He rushed off, muttering, and Vic bent, started fumbling with his laces.

The next moment, the flowerlike fragrance whose name Vic did not know trailed across his nostrils, and then a pair of trim ankles, nylon-sleek legs, twinkled past him. He knotted his laces again, heard the street door thud shut. He got up then and went back through the door in the partition.

A little man, bald, spectacled, turned to him from a shelflike desk that was bracketed to the sidewall on the left. Vic thrust past him, got hands on the wrapped shoebox that lay on the shelf.

"Is this the package that young lady just left?" he asked.

"Why, yes." The manager goggled at him. "Has—has there been some mistake?"

"Maybe." Vic tore the paper from the box, knocked off its lid. He pawed at the cordovan brogans nested in it. He pulled one out, and wrenched at its heel. "If I'm right—"

The heel held—then came away, and white flakes puffed from a cavity in the leather to which it had been nailed, danced glistening in the light.

"I am right, mister," Vic said fervently. "You don't know how lucky you are that I caught this."

The cocaine had been placed in the shoes while they were out of the store. Fasset would have mailed them to the Workhouse in all innocence, would not by morning have been able to identify the girl who'd brought them there. 'This sort of thing,' he'd said, 'happens all the time,' and that made it very clear how the narcotic smuggling was being worked, and that it was done without any Maclin clerk's complicity.

Ellen Staine was one of those working it. Wide-eyed, naive, Captain Staine's daughter had betrayed him to Matt Rawley's killers, had betrayed three good cops to death, perhaps a fourth—perhaps John Dunn.

"I—I don't understand," the manager quavered. "What—" He choked off.

Vic turned to him, and stiffened. Beyond the little man another man shouldered shut the partition door, planted his back against it and brought out from under his coat's flap a snub-nosed automatic.

"All right you two," he said softly. "Freeze."

He was the man with the sensuous mouth whom, in the Workhouse office, Ellen had called Tom. Too late, Vic realized that the driver of the convertible must have kept a lookout after he had dropped the girl. The driver had spotted him, had watched him follow Ellen into this store.

CHAPTER VII

A Secret Call

THE shoe store manager quaked. "Don't shoot," he cried. "I'll get the money out of the safe."

"Cut!" the intruder snapped. "You'd like this to be a stickup, but it ain't." His free hand pulled a gold-colored badge from a vest pocket, put it away again. "I'm the Law. Detective Sergeant Layden, City Police." His eyes, brown agates, moved to Vic. "And you're Joe Nudd, wanted for murder." The eyes dropped to the shoe in Vic's hand. "Looks like I've hit the jackpot."

"Looks like it," Vic agreed. "The fellow might be a cop at that, and an honest one, played by the Staine girl for a sucker. "So what?"

"Pack those shoes up and don't try any funny business. My trigger finger's nervous."

He was smart. He was keeping six feet back. Vic shrugged, turned and put the shoe and its heel back in the box, very carefully. He wrapped the paper around it.

"Where's the string, Mr. Fasset?"

"Never mind that, Dunn," Layden put in before the little man could answer. "Pick it up and let's go. Both of you."

"No," Vic said wearily. "I don't relish the notion of taking a ride with a lead meal at the end of it. If you're going to iron us out, you'll have to do it here."

Heat lightning flickered in Layden's eyes and the knuckles of his gun-hand whitened, but Vic went on, smoothly.

"You're too smart to do it, though, Layden. You know you could get me and Fasset, but the clerks outside would hear the shots so you'd have to blast them too, and Rand Avenue's too jammed with traffic for a quick getaway."

"Wise guy," Layden grunted. "I—"

The doorknob behind him rattled and the door itself started to open, was stopped by his back.

"Eleven o'clock, Mr. Fasset," someone called through the opening. "Time to quit."

The automatic swayed to the manager. "Stall them."

Fasset licked his lips, got out, "Just a minute, Ned. We're talking business."

The door clicked shut and Layden prowled away from it, past the clothes-hung hooks on the wall opposite the desk to a stack of wooden cases against which he leaned.

"Get rid of your clerks," he murmured, "or I'll have to. Shots in here won't be heard out in the street."

His gun was concealed in his coat-pocket, but he could shoot through cloth and he still was too far away for anything but a frantic gamble on which Vic had no right to bet three lives beside his own.

"We've got to play along," he told the whimpering Fasset. "Tell your clerks we're brass hats from your Central Office discussing changes in operation. Tell them we're going to be here quite a while yet but there's no reason for them to stay around."

"Now you're on the beam," the gunman said. "Now you make sense. Talk up, Fasset."

The manager sounded almost natural, relaying the message. Layden watched the clerks as they exchanged store coats for street clothes, but they were too dulled by their long day, too eager to end it, to notice anything wrong. Acting the big shot from the High Command, Vic told them to turn out the lights in the front of the store as they went out.

"And throw the latch on the street door. We don't want any customers barging in."

Vic sighed with relief when they were gone. He would have felt better if he could have got the bespectacled little man safely out as well, but that couldn't be done.

"Thanks pal," Layden grinned, his gun in sight again. "Thanks for fixing it for me." The shot was a flat blow against Vic's eardrums and Fasset squealed like a stepped-on puppy as he sprawled sidewise and down.

An iron case-opener Vic had snatched from the shelf-desk cracked Layden's wrist and Layden's second shot pounded harmlessly into the floor. Then Vic leaped at him. The flash of his hand was too fast to see, but the killer crumpled, hit the floor with a dull thud and rolled atop his gun. Scarlet fluid filled the cup between his nostrils and pouted upper lip, streamed down over the round of his cheek, dwindled to a trickle as Vic, kneeling, pressed temporal arteries with the balls of his thumbs.

He turned his eyes to where Fasset sprawled atop a shambles of crushed cardboard boxes, his glasses gone.

"Okay, Fasset. Knot a couple of shoelaces together and give them to me. Step on it. This judo's tricky stuff and I've got a lot of questions to ask our friend here before he cashes in."

The little man's mouth spewed sounds that had no meaning, then made words.

"Laces. I'm dying and you want—"

"The devil you're dying. That pain is in your bottom where I kicked you out of the way of his lead. Pull yourself together and get me those laces."

NOOSED tightly around Layden's forehead, the black cord stopped the blood flow. His pulse was feeble, but steady.

"He'll do," Vic decided, "till we can have a doc look him over. But I don't think he'll be passing himself off as a cop again for a long time."

"How—how did you know he wasn't a cop?" Fasset jittered, hovering over him. "He showed his badge, didn't he?"

"He knew that stuff in the shoe was cocaine. If he was a police detective, he wouldn't have left here till he had one of your clerks phone Headquarters to get the Narcotics Squad here to take over, search the premises for more. And he wouldn't have tried to take the two of us out of here single-handed. That badge—well, let's look at it." He fumbled the metal shield out of the unconscious man's pocket.

It was a police badge. It was the

badge of a sergeant of detectives and on the back was engraved the name, Thomas Layden.

His face a tight mask, Vic rose. He stepped to a telephone at the far end of the shelf desk.

"I've got a confidential police call to make," he said. "Please go outside and and sit down way up at the front of the store, where you can't hear me."

The little man looked as if he were going to refuse, but he did not. He stumbled through the partition and out into the darkened store. Vic got his hands on the phone, dialed a number. The ringing signal burred twice and cut off and he heard, "Police Headquarters. Information."

"This is the Gray Squirrel Inn," Vic said. "We've a gentleman here asking us to cash a check for him. He says he's a police detective and he has a badge all right, but the Hotel Association's warned us about a confidence man out West who's been using that stunt to pass rubber checks, so I'd like to verify his credentials. He says his name is Layden. L-A-Y-D-E-N. He's about five-ten, brown hair, brown eyes."

"Yeah," the voice said. "That's Tom Layden. He's a detective all right, on the Gambling and Narcotics squad. Give him what he wants, mister."

"Thanks." Vic hung up, stood with his hand on the hard rubber. He should have called Captain Dan Staine. He should call Staine now, but something was keeping him from doing it. What? He remembered. Layden had dropped a single word that didn't fit into the pattern which otherwise was so clear. Because of that word, Vic had to find out something before he called Dan Staine.

He went back to the unconscious man, squatted down and loosened the cord around his temples. The clotted blood in his nostrils stayed dry. Vic slipped the lace off altogether, and used it to lash Layden's wrists. He got up and found another pair of laces. From a metal first aid box that hung on the wall beside the clothes rack he got a roll of adhesive tape. He bound Layden's ankles with the laces, tore a length of plaster from the roll and stripped this over the renegade detective's lips, pocketing the rest of the roll. He retrieved the automatic from under the man's body, saw Fasset's glasses, miraculously unbroken, and picked them up. He went out through the partition and along the row of chairs toward the manager.

Fasset saw him coming and scrambled up, exclaiming, "You—! I just realized that, with that kick, you saved my life at the risk of your own. You didn't know he'd shoot at me first."

"Think nothing of it," Vic smiled. "That's what I'm paid for. Here's your specs. You see, I'm a real cop, not a phony like that guy in there, and it's my job to protect citizens. How good a citizen are you, Mr. Fasset?"

"I—well, I try to be a pretty good one. Why?"

"Because I need your help and it's going to take nerve. How about it?"

THE little man fumbled his glasses into place. "What do you want me to do?" he asked, quietly.

"I've got to go somewhere and tie up a loose end of this case before that thug's confederates find out what's happened to him. There are reasons I can't give you why I can't call in outside help. What you can do for me is simple. Just watch him and that shoebox till I get back. Here." He gave the little man Layden's automatic, showed him how it worked. "You won't need it, but you'll feel safer having it. Okay?"

"Okay."

Vic headed for Dan Staine's neighborhood. When he got there he kept as close to the walls of the houses as the wood-railed steps that dropped down from their backdoors would allow. He reached the rear of the third house from the sidestreet, and bent to the basement window at which he'd caught Ellen Staine, three nights before. The weathered sash wouldn't move. It was locked.

He pulled the roll of adhesive tape from his pocket and covered the pane with a crisscross net of plaster. Looping one length from the center to make a sort of handle through which he slipped the fingers of his left hand, he fisted his right hand and smashed it into the taped-up glass.

The plaster net protected his knuckles and kept the pane from shattering. The loop kept it from falling, and there was hardly any sound. He lifted the smashed glass out of its frame and, laying it gently on the pavement, reached in and found the lock. The sash opened with a scarcely audible rasp.

The basement floor was about four feet

beneath the sill. Enough moonglow filtered in so that Vic could make out, to his right, ladderlike stairs slanting up to a door. Beyond the stairs was the dark loom of a furnace, the smaller bulk of a hotwater tank and the squat shape of the laundry stove that fed the latter. An odor of coal gas, and a warm radiance on his face as he prowled back there, told him that the little stove held fire. Very carefully, he opened its firedoor, to let its red glow dimly illumine the cellar's deeper reaches.

A coal bin, half full, took up all the front width of the basement. A shovel, drawbar, and a long poker hung from nails driven into the whitewashed, gypsum blocks of the side wall near the furnace. The other long sidewall was blank. Except for an ashcan, the concrete floor was clear. Vic peered into the can and found it empty.

He straightened again, sniffing the air. It was tainted by a scent he'd not noticed before, a faint smell, but one too pungent to escape notice for long. His eyes went to the laundry stove's open firedoor. This was the only thing that had changed since his entrance. Only from there could come the odor of burned rubber.

A chair scraped the ceiling above him and Vic was aware of someone moving about on the first floor. He closed the stove door as noiselessly as he'd opened it, stepped to the edge of the coal pile and picked up a lump. He wrapped it in his handkerchief. Then he went behind the furnace to the wall where the firetools hung, plucked the drawbar from its nail and flung it down.

The iron clatter shattered the nocturnal hush.

CHAPTER VIII

Trapped

STEPS thudded across the floor overhead. Hinges rasped and yellow brightness leaped down the stairs outlining the long, taut shadow of a man, his crooked arm terminated by the shadow of a drawn gun.

Vic heaved the coal he'd picked up. It went cleanly through the gaping window frame and thudded on the pavement outside. The inverted shadow of Dan Staine's head jerked to the cloth-muffled sound.

"Father!" A distant cry reached Vic. "What is it? What was that noise?"

The cellar door swung almost shut, so there was only an inch-wide strip between door-edge and jamb. But Vic could hear the spat of bare feet on linoleum.

"Someone's in the cellar!" Ellen exclaimed, breathless.

"Nonsense," her father growled. "I threw the poker downstairs. I'd just banked the laundry stove and I was thinking about something and forgot and carried the poker up with me. I was so sore at myself that I forgot the racket it would make. Sorry, puss. I'm sorry I waked you."

"You scared me out of a year's growth."

"I said I was sorry. Now go on back up and get under the covers. You'll catch your death standing here like that. Go on. Scat."

"Not unless you come too." Ellen's voice was wire-edged. "Please, father. Please come."

"Well-ll. Well, I guess it is time I was turning in." The light blacked out as the door closed completely, and a metallic rattle told Vic a bolt was being shoved into its socket. The sound of feet moved across the upstairs floor.

Vic moved too, but only into the space between the furnace and the wall where the moonlight did not reach. He put his back against the wall. Waited. While he waited, he tried to think.

Shortly, there was the scrape of the bolt being withdrawn. Someone was coming down. That rasp of metal on metal was the door's hinges as the door slowly opened, but no light came through from the kitchen, only a dark form that moved out onto the stairs and hesitated there, breath whispering.

Something was hidden in this basement worth a thief's while to steal, and one of the two Staines had desperate need to learn whether it had been stolen, but which one Vic could not yet make out. The dark figure was moving again. It came silently down the stairs and into the brightening moonlight and went diagonally across the basement floor to the wall opposite Vic Dunn's hiding place. An arm lifted head-high, pressed

the wall. One of the gypsum blocks pivoted out. It was not a block but a thin metal door painted to match the rest of the wall and there was a black oblong cavity behind it. The arm reached in, brought out a quart-size, wide-mouthed bottle half-filled with a white powder that glistened like snow in the moonlight.

A relieved sigh reached Vic and he leaned out to try and look into the secret cache, but the bottle, being returned to it, blocked the view. A hot pipe seared Vic's cheek, wrenched a gasp from him and Dan Staine whirled, a revolver abruptly in his thrusting fist.

"Come out of there," he said. "Grab air and come out."

Hands at shoulder level, Vic stepped out from behind the water tank whose feed pipe had burned him. Staine stiffened.

"You," he said. "Dunn."

"Right," Vic said, his throat unlocking. "Vincent Dunn, not John. We keep coming up, don't we? One of us finds you out, and you have him bushwacked, and then there's another on your tail. There's no getting rid of us, is there?"

The gaunt man's laugh was harsh and ugly. "I got rid of your old man and you've made it even easier for me to get rid of you. How could I guess the prowler in my cellar was my old friend's son, even if he did call up and threaten me just before he disappeared, three days ago? Another war psychosis the army doctors missed, poor fellow. He got it into his addled brain that I was responsible for his father's death and—"

"Neat," Vic broke in, "but you're not sure you can get away with it. Someone must have sent me back here. You had me fooled, and suddenly I show up and trick you into uncovering your cache of cocaine. 'Who is it?' you're asking yourself. 'Who knows Vic Dunn's here, and why?' You can't fire that gun until you know."

IT WORKED. It held Staine's shot. It wrenched a curse from him, "You'll burn in hell."

"The hell you've lived in for a year, Dan Staine?" Vic pressed his tenuous advantage. "No. That's a special hell of fear in which you found yourself when you learned that John Dunn's son had changed his mind and was joining the Force. Did John write him something that points to me, you asked yourself. Is he making himself a cop so as to track me down? Right, Captain Staine?"

The way the moon-shadowed, fleshless cheeks sucked in was answer enough.

"And so," Vic resumed, his voice low, controlled, "fear of me grew until you decided that I too must die. But your twisted brain had to find a twisted way to do it. You waited till I had my badge and you could send me, without anyone else knowing where I'd gone, into the City Workhouse where no one bothers to investigate an accident to an inmate too carefully. Where a vagrant called Joe Nudd could die and be buried in a pauper's grave and no one would tie his death to the inexplicable disappearance of a rookie cop named Vincent Dunn."

"You devil," Staine gasped, but his gun did not waver the hairsbreadth that could give Vic a chance to leap across the space between them.

"And even better," Vic continued, "the men who killed Nudd wouldn't know you had anything to do with it because they haven't the faintest notion you're tied in with the drug ring."

Vic pulled in breath, asked, "How did that happen? You once were an honest cop. How did you get into this mess in the first place?" But he didn't wait for a reply. "I'll tell you." The whole black pattern had come clear for him, and the idea was to keep talking, to keep Staine listening. "You were burned up, years ago, when John Dunn was made a sergeant and you stayed a patrolman. It ate into you still more when he became a lieutenant and you were only a sergeant, and when he got his double bars against your single one and in the bargain was your boss on the squad, you couldnt take it any longer.

"It was jealousy that moved you to tip the narcotic mob to John Dunn's moves against them, in the hope that when he failed to stop them he'd lose his command and you'd get it. You didn't expect that because of your tips they'd murder three of your own men. But when that happened, they had you by the short hairs and really put the screws on. Not satisfied to use you merely as an information source and a cover, they pulled you all the way into their operations. You were lost. You couldn't fight free. You gave up

trying and went the whole hog. And then John Dunn came across a clue that you knew would expose you and so you had to silence him."

The moon had dropped low enough for its full radiance to slant in through the smashed window and show Vic Staine's eyes.

The man was almost at the breaking point.

"That was your second mistake, Staine. The third was in trusting the stooge you sent to tip Matt Rawley I was a cop. You should have known that in the clutch, Tom Layden would cave."

In the back of the Maclin shop, Layden had said, 'Never mind that, *Dunn*. . . . Let's go.' He could have gotten Vic's name only from Staine. Ellen hadn't seen Vic since she was five.

"You should have expected," Vic hammered the point, "that Layden would turn you in to save his own skin."

Staine swore and Vic's muscles coiled to leap.

"Keep back!" The gun glinted, jabbing at him. "Stay right there." A thin thread of hysteria flickered in Staine's voice.

"I'm not going anywhere," Vic said smoothly. "I just wanted to tell you the fourth mistake you made. No matter how badly you needed someone to fool the Maclin clerks into mailing the gimmicked shoes to the Workhouse, you lost all sense of decency when you involved your daughter, Ellen. Of all the filthy tricks you've pulled—"

Staine's gun, blasting, drove Vic back against the wall.

VIC lurched sidewise, flinging himself toward the protection of the furnace. Agony rayed from his smashed shoulder.

He heard the scrape of Staine's shoes as the killer circled to get a clear shot at him and finish him, and he tried to shove up.

He saw the half-crouched, gaunt form come between him and the light. He didn't hear the bullet nor feel it. He was aware only of a blinding dazzle that exploded inside his skull. He seemed to hear, most strangely, a thin cry, "No! Don't shoot!" and his eyes cleared and he was aware that the light was not inside his head, but filling the cellar, silhouetting Staine, who half-turned from Vic to the girl who came off the stairs and ran toward him, robed in gossamer silk.

"Give me that gun." She'd got to Staine, her hand out for his weapon. "Please give me it, father."

He pulled out of her reach, but otherwise was motionless. "I've got to kill him, Ellen. He lied about you. He said that you—"

"I heard him." Queer that she should seem shamed. That she should make a small gesture, as if in appeal for forgiveness. "He didn't lie. I did take a pair of shoes into the Rand Avenue Maclin shop and ask to have them mailed to the Workhouse. Tom said he was in a hurry and asked me to."

"Tom?" Staine broke in, harshly. "So that's where you've been all afternoon and evening. With him! I told you to stay away from him, didn't I? I told you he was no good. You little tramp, I ought to—"

His free hand lashed to slap her, but merely flicked her shoulder as he went down. His feet had been pulled out from under him by Vic's one-handed yank.

Shoulder screaming with pain, Vic squirmed atop Staine, stiff fingers jabbing a vital ganglion of nerves. Staine suddenly was still. Vic struggled erect, his right arm dangling useless. His eyes found the girl's face.

"Don't worry," he said. "He's just temporarily paralyzed. He'll be all right."

"All right?" she repeated, bitterly, and her eyes came up to meet Vic's. "I heard every word you said, Vic Dunn. I was listening at the cellar door, waiting for him to deny it, and he didn't. Why didn't you kill him when you had the chance? Why aren't you merciful? Must you let the world know what he is?"

Vic pulled the back of his hand across his forehead. "I'm afraid I'll have to, Ellen." He was very tired. "Most of this mess has to be cleaned up, and with what he knows, it can be cleaned up. Without him, we'd have to start almost at the beginning again."

"But will he tell what he knows?"

For some reason, Vic was very certain of his answer. "He will, and gladly. You see, Ellen, he's got nothing to be afraid of any longer, and nothing to gain by being evasive. He's free to be,

at last, what he started out to be. A good cop. The world won't know or care, but he will, and so will you. See what I mean?"

"Yes," the girl whispered. "Yes, Vic Dunn, I see what you mean." The fine clean scent of her trailed to him, the fragrance of a flower he could not name. "Thank you."

He did not ask her why she thanked him. He knew.

"There's a frightened little man waiting for me in a dark store," he said. "Where's your phone?"

"Upstairs. In the hall outside—in the entrance hall."

Stumbling toward the ladderlike stairs, Vic Dunn wanted to ask Ellen what the name of that perfume was. Now was not the time. It seemed impossible that the time would ever come when they could talk of such trifles but he knew, somehow, that it would come. He could wait.

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JAIL AND THE HARVARDS

By JOE ARCHIBALD

A CLIENT walked into the Hawkeye Detective Agency one morning and caught the proprietor, William J. Klump, eating breakfast. Willie had those little seeds that come with certain coffee cakes around his mouth and there was half a bottle of milk on his desk. Willie was slightly embarrassed but the client seemed pleased to be there.

"Mornin', pal," the visitor said with a grin. "Guess things are kind of tough everywheres an' now I know you'll understand my problem."

"It is just I am too busy to spend time waitin' for bacon and eggs in a restaurant," Willie said. "I can give you five minutes as I got plenty of work on the books."

"Let's put our cards on the table, Klump. You need some dough. I need a smart ops."

"Go on," Willie said, returning half a bun to a paper bag for future reference.

The client introduced himself as Hubert Zeff. Willie did not take to the character over much. Zeff had a face

Gumshoe Willie Klump doesn't know what an "expediter" is but finds out—in a hurry!

As the water-cooler landed on Brink's foot, he yelled and howled

the shape of a narrow wedge of beanery pie and his eyes were as close together as Minneapolis and St. Paul. He wore a double-breasted pin-striped blue suit and a plaid shirt, a purple necktie with yellow horses galloping on it, and saddle shoes.

"Er, what is your business?" Willie asked.

"Me? What do I do fer a livin' huh? I'd say I was an—er—expediter. I hurry things along where they're goin'."

"I see," Willie muttered, and picked up a pad and pencil. "State your business, Mr. Zeff."

"It's this way, Klump. Had a bad month. Piled up a hotel bill at the place where I stay. About sixty bucks, I'd say. They'll knock on my door in a day or so and tell me to pay or they'll git the cops. Here is my idea and it'll net you fifteen bucks, and leave me ten to git out of town. You come in tomorrer, flash your badge, and say I'm pinched. The cops don't worry about rent owed by crooks, see? You walk me out. When we git in the clear I hand you the fee and scram. How's that for easy moola, Klump? Buy a lot of them buns you eat."

WILLIAM J. KLUMP rose to his full height. Righteous indignation spread all over his rural physiognomy. He pointed to the door.

"Leave this instant!" he snapped. "To think anybody else would think I'd stoop to such skull digging! I should call a cop, Mr. Zeff!"

"No kiddin'? Well, I made a mistake, Buster. No harm done. A guy don't know what he can do until he tries!" The visitor got up, dusted off his seat, straightened his lapels, leered at the shamus, and strolled to the door. "No wonder you got shiny pants, Junior," he sneered, then went out and slammed the door.

William Klump settled in his chair, riled by the fact that men were born with a conscience.

"Fifteen bucks just like pickin' it off the sidewalk," he said ruefully, then went after the remnants of the seed bun. "I wonder what an expediter does."

Willie's phone rang and he snatched it up. "The Hawkeye Detective Agency, Inc., missin' persons found, skip tr—Oh, it is you, Gertie."

"Yeah. What other dame you expect was callin', huh? Guilty conscience, that's what. If I ever find out you—I called to make sure you didn't forgit our date tonight, Willie."

"Look, Gert. I am pressed for dough. I need it worst than a baker, ha-ha!"

"I give you three bucks only last Monday, Willie. What you do with it all?"

"If I was a canary I could of made it last if I run a budget," Willie said. "I know, I know, we got to think of the future, but you can starve to death as quick in the present."

"I don't like them incinerations, Willie Klump," Gertrude Mudgett countered. "Okay, I'll bring a five."

"What is an expediter, Gert?"

"Why, what else could it be but somebody goes on expeditions, Willie."

"See you tonight," Willie sighed, and hung up.

Hours later, William Klump convoyed Gertie Mudgett out of the Blue Turkey on Fifty-Fourth, and the private snooper marveled.

"We should call this the miracle on Fifty-Fourth, Gert. It is the first time in weeks we were not flang out of a joint before gettin' to the biscuit tortoni."

Gertie clung to Willie like ivy to a chimney. "It is because we got readjustable, Willie, and are ready to git married. Why don't we git the license first thing in the mornin'? Oh, that's wonderful! I'll meet you at nine o'clock. You darl—"

A blonde came out of a cigar store and rushed at Willie. "Dar-r-rlin'! Willie, what a time that was the other night! You with that lamp shade on your head and wrapped in my kimoner. The people just howled! Hee-hee!"

"There is a mistake," Willie gulped. "Stop, Gertie!"

William Klump felt the handbag come down through the top of his felt hat and start entering his skull. When he groped to his feet he saw three Satchelfoot Kelly's and three blondes. Gertie was gone. Kelly laughed like a hyena filled with carrion.

"It was a gag, Willie," he said. "Me and Eva here—"

William Klump offered his hand to Kelly. "Shake, old friend. You saved me that time, awright."

"What-a-a-t?"

"It is an ill wind like you that can't blow even me somethin' good," Willie said. "She almost had me."

"Come on, babe," Satchelfoot said and grabbed the blonde. "That belt didn't do him no good. I don't want to be around where there's a fractured skull."

AT NINE O'CLOCK the next morning Willie went anywhere but the City Hall. He did not want to be near a telephone for awhile so he took a bus ride far uptown and back again. He entered his office at noon and the phone rang him a greeting.

"Might as well git it over with," Willie sighed.

It was Satchelfoot Kelly. The flatfoot was in a gloating mood.

"Well, for once you didn't git in my hair at a murder, Willie! Yeah, we investigated what looked like one this A.M. around eight. We have a suspect down here now talkin' to Lieutenant Schniff. Yeah, his name is Onslow Brink and he is president of the Friendly Hand Loan Company. A corpse was found in his house but he's got an alibi for all night. His wife who has been away at her ma's come in and discovered the remains of a mug named Harry Kish. Don't you even read the papers, Willie? I'm in charge."

Willie immediately locked up his office and headed for the nearest subway. Half an hour later, outside Lieutenant Schniff's office, he got an assortment of details from citizens attached to the gendarmerie. It seemed that Kish was an old pal of Brink, and the loan shark had not seen Kish for nearly fifteen years. Brink had invited Kish to his home, half of a two-family brick house just off Katonah Avenue in the Woodlawn section.

Brink had had an appointment but had told Kish his house was at his disposal, also the grog in his closet. Brink had gotten into an all-night poker brawl in a downtown hotel and had not found out about the rubout until the cops had roused him at eight o'clock in the morning.

The door of the Lieutenant's office opened and a tall and stout dapper citizen came out with Schniff.

"Anythin' else I can do to help clear this awful thing up, let me know, Lieutenant," he said. "I got to go to Mrs. Brink as she is in an awful state."

"Yeah, thanks," Schniff said, and spotted Willie. "Why, Klump, what are you doin' here? Come on in for a couple minutes. After what I been through, I need a laugh."

"You got nothin' on that geezer, huh?" Willie asked.

"He's as clean as a religious pamphlet," Schniff said ruefully. "Was a case of mistaken identity, Willie. Look, here is a letter he got two weeks ago. Some client he lent a hun'red bucks to an' had to grab the collateral. It's anonymous."

"They'll get that guy some day," Willie opined and scanned the typewritten threatening epistle.

Dear Rat:—I guess you think you've seen the last of me since you took my second-hand car because I was ten days overdue payin' that dough back. The Friendly Hand Loan Co., hah! You have stole the bread out of my mouth and you will pay. It is about time somebody fixed your wagon, you petty larceny crook! It might as well be me.

Willie tossed the letter to Schniff's desk. "Huh, even Kelly ought to be able to find that citizen."

"Won't be so easy. Brink said he took seven jalopies the last six months because of loans wasn't paid," Schniff said. "I always wanted to kill me a loan shark myself. The public ain't goin' to bother us much if we don't solve this one. What you been doin' lately, pal?"

"Livin' on detainin' fees," Willie said. "So this Kish was sleepin' in a bed at Brink's house. A dissatisfied client sneaks up to an open winder and empties two pellets from an equalizer into his torso and thinks all the time he rubbed out Brink. It is the worst I ever heard. What did Kish do for a livin' and where was he from?"

"Leave us let real cops handle this, Willie," the lieutenant said sternly. "We're investigatin' the whereabouts last night of all the characters who lost their cars to the Friendly Hand Loan Company, and should make an arrest—"

"Within twenty-four hours," Willie interrupted. "The cops ought to put on a different record. Well, I can take a hint, so don't worry about me stealin' Satchelfoot's stuff. All he has an ant could carry. Good day."

WILLIAM KLUMP walked out of the big detective's office and ran into Satchelfoot Kelly on the way in. "Lookin' for crumbs, crumb?" Kelly sneered.

"I was just tellin' Schniff that any time he wants somebody to fill your shoes,"

Willie said, "I know a good contractor owns the biggest steam shovel in the city. You could prove to the Harvards that two feet make one yard."

"You are as funny as a runaway orphan with her foot caught in a bear trap!" Kelly snapped. "An' don't start messin' around with this murder of mine!"

"Speakin' of citizens mindin' their own business, Kelly," Willie sniffed. "Maybe you've forgot last night, huh? I will make no promises one way or the other."

A few minutes later in a tavern not far from the Bridge of Sighs, William Klump jotted notes down on a pad, for Willie's thoughts, once born, were as transitory as so many snowflakes dropping onto a hot griddle. Even to Willie, the erasure of one Harry Kish seemed unorthodox and, although he never had been considered an egotist by his severest critics, the president of the Hawkeye told himself that here was a challenge to his inimitable talents. An idea hit Willie and ran him right out of the ginmill, and an hour later he was standing in front of a desk occupied by a very fetching auburn-locked receptionist, his hat in his hand.

"Yeah, Mr. Brink is expected back any minute," the mouse said, appraising Willie's ensemble disdainfully. "But to be frank, I don't figure you'd have a chancet to get a loan."

"I'll wait," Willie said loftily, and took a seat in the waiting room of the Friendly Hand Loan Company, Inc. His eyes roved to the framed come-ons hanging on the walls. They said:

Don't Go Smash—Borrow Our Cash!
Fur Coat For Honey?—Use Our Money!
Don't Go to Joe—Keep Your Watch—
Use Our Dough!
It Is Always Lent At the Friendly Hand.

"Not bad," Willie complimented.

"Lay off, custard-puss," the doll yelped.

"I wa'n't speakin' to you," Willie sniffed. "Ha, seein' you do work at the Friendly Hand it looks like you like to be alone. A loan, get it?"

"Oh, brother!" the girl choked out just as Onslow Brink walked in. "Boss, I sure am glad you're here. How did things go downtown?"

"Not bad, Miss Ogrodzyski," Brink replied and took a gander at Willie. "Didn't I see you outside that detective's office awhile ago?"

"My card," Willie said, and handed one over.

"Private Investigator," Brink read, and shook his head.

Miss Ogrodzyski laughed very loud. "Now I have seen everythin', Mr. Brink."

Willie said stiffly: "Detectives shouldn't look like one. What is so funny about that?"

"Come in, Klump," Brink said. He chewed very savagely over what was left of his cigar, and when he sat down at his desk he mopped his round features with a big hanky. "What's on your mind?"

"Pertection is all," Willie said. "Seein' you got your life threatened oncet and missed a mortician's tender hands by a miracle, it could happen ag'in where you didn't have a stooge. My fee is small, say a detainer of ten bucks each week."

"I could get real detectives," Brink snapped, studying Willie closely.

"Wrong, Mr. Brink. They are on a city payroll and wouldn't fritter away enough time on you. Maybe, in two or three weeks, it will all blow over and you won't need me. Of courst if you think the cops will get the real culprit, and you know who it is awready, I'll just not waste your valuable time and mine."

"Wait, Klump," the loan expert suddenly said. "Er, you are right. Could be he would try again now he knows he shot the wrong man. It is a deal."

BEFORE he put on his hat, Willie spotted the group picture of approximately sixteen brawny pigskin chasers that adorned the wall of Brink's office. They wore the old fashioned pants that might have been made out of old bed quilts. Some had nose-guards and four of them wore luxuriant mustaches. The letter H was on the turtle-neck sweater of each.

"Why, you played for the Harvards, huh?" Willie asked.

"Well, ha-ha, not exactly, Klump. I was fullback on the Harvard Squares, a team we had there just for medical students. We played the varsity in practise and teams of our caliber—"

"You studied to extract appendixes from citizens and wound up extractin' collaterals," Willie quipped.

"That's rich, Klump," laughed the loan

expert. "Ha-a-a!"

"This Kish," Willie said. "An old friend, huh?"

"Knew him years ago," Onslow Brink said. "Not too well. One of those men, Klump, who'll take advantage of anything when they want to put the bite on you."

"Yeah," Willie said. "Where they don't have to pay interest or put up a radio or jalopy or nothin'. Well, he sure did you a favor. He couldn't of put up any more than he did, could he?"

"If he hadn't been drunk on my liquor he might've heard that man at the window, Klump. Picked my bed to sleep in. Whew, I sweat pickled onions every time I think of what happened."

"Must of been quite a shock to Mrs. B.," Willie said. "Seein' a dead man in her husband's bed, she was sure had to be you but wasn't."

"It was awful. Let's forget it, Klump. I got an inquest to suffer through yet," Onslow Brink said.

"Take it easy as I start lookin' after you as of now," Willie said.

The president of the Hawkeye Detective Agency took his leave. Passing by the auburn-haired mouse, Willie facetiously lowered an eyelid. She told him to drop dead.

William Klump thought he had better check with the D.A. seeing Brink had hired him for protecton. He went downtown.

"Sure, Willie, it'll save us assignin' a man to watch him, not that he could be guilty," the D.A. said with a grin. "I am glad to see you are on the ball."

"I hope it is not marked with an eight," Willie said, then gasped and reached for something that lay on the desk. It was a group picture of football players and he recognized the faces. The date, 1909. "W-where you get it, D.A.? Was you a Harvard Square?"

"Found it on the old suitcase belonged to Kish, the deceased," the D.A. said. "The Bowery-Plaza called me. Only other stuff was an extra shirt, a pair of socks and a Harding button. Why?"

Satchelfoot Kelly walked in, and Willie clammed. "We're checkin' all over on Kish's prints, boss," Kelly said. "What are you doin' here, lemonhead?"

"Because I ain't nowheres else, and it is none of your business, Kelly," Willie sniffed. "Don't lose that pitcher whatever you do, D.A. I'll have somethin' maybe interestin' 'fore long."

"Ha-a-a!" Kelly guffawed.

"Awright, mushmouth, be outside of the Friendly Loan Company at ten A.M. What did I say that for?"

"I'll be there," Satchelfoot sneered.

At precisely ten-fifteen, Willie and Satchelfoot were ushered into the presence of Onslow Brink. The citizen who was pushing sixty but looked much younger waved them to chairs. Before he sat down Willie pointed at a picture on the wall, an old Currier & Ives job. His lower jaw dangled.

"W-where is it? The pitcher of the Harvards?"

Brink glanced toward Satchelfoot Kelly. "Is this man Klump, a heavy drinker, Kelly? Or is he just plain wacky? What picture's he talkin' about?"

"Oh, you know it was there, Brink!" Willie yelped. "You had a hunch when I left yesterday, and ditched it. And you got a reason. I resign my job with you, as from now on I am after you instead of pertectin' you!"

"Kelly, get this screwball out of here!" Brink growled. "Any questions on your mind? I got to attend the inquest at three P.M. I could answer 'em all there."

"Come on, Willie," Satchelfoot yipped. "When we git outside throw away that tin badge. You are a menace."

Onslow Brink laughed as they went out.

LEST we run this adventure of Willie Klump half way into the next month it behooves us to record the events of the next few days chronologically.

March 7th. The inquest practically gave Onslow Brink a green light. Onslow proved most conclusively he was with certain parties from 9 P.M. to 8 A.M. on the night of the liquidation. His wife proved she was on a Pullman at the time. . . .

March 9th. A report from Police Headquarters in Chicago stated that the description of the murder victim, also the prints of his fingers thereof, convinced the Illinois finest that he was a character known as LeRoy Pasher who was recently released from a ten-year stretch at Joliet. Harry Kish was most likely an alias. . . .

March 11th. Cops quizzed Onslow Brink regarding the murder victim. Did he ever know the defunct by another

name except Harry Kish? Onslow replied in the negative. Maybe Kish had a couple other aliases he used before he even went to the klink. You never know who you run into. . . .

March 12th. The D.A. told Satchelfoot Kelly, "Hard Hat" Hafey, and Willie Klump that Pasher, alias Kish, had had the book thrown at him in Chi for selling widows parts of a plutonium mine that never was, and that a character by the name of George Inglerfritz had been suspected of being in on the take. Eighty grand taken from the widows had never been dug up. . . .

March 14th. Willie Klump advised the Law to send the group football picture of the Harvard Squares to the ancient seat of learning to get the names of all the 1909 athletes, or send somebody up with it.

"I got a hunch the victim and the assassin both packed the pigskin on that team," Willie said emphatically, "even though Brink claims that pitcher never hung in his office."

"Okay," the D.A. sighed. "Even I'll do that if it'll help."

March 16th. The last of the citizens who had given their jalopies as collateral to the Friendly Hand Loan Co., was put on the grill. The police had finally picked him up in a shooting gallery in Boston. His name was Ryerson Slobodovitch, and the citizen was sorry he couldn't remember a thing about that awful night, having been plastered from sundown to dawn. The cops held Slobodovitch as a suspect.

"Looks like we don't have to go no further," Satchelfoot Kelly sniffed. "We're buildin' a mountain inside of a moleskin."

"Sure," Hard Hat offered. "Citizens get mixed up sociable with crooks and never know it—like Onslow Brink. Anyways leave me out of it from now on. I owe that loan outfit a hun'red bucks, see?"

"No matter what, Brink, as we all know, never was near his house at the time of the murder," the D.A. said. "So he couldn't have done it without radar. It looks like it is just like he said, boys."

"I don't trust the bum," Willie said adamantly.

John Harvard is proud of his archives, athletically as well as academically. One of his disciples did not spare the horses cooperating with the big town's criminology Institute. Came in due time to the D.A.'s office the group picture of the 1909 Harvard Squares with every turtlenecked stalwart identified in pen and ink. The D.A. invited William Klump down for a gander.

"There it is," the private sleuth yipped. "Harlow Kirsch, center! It sounds like Kish, huh? And here is a hero with a Stalin upper lip curtain and a long schnoz named Brinkerhofer who was fullback. That loan shark admitted he played with the Squares the day I saw the pitcher."

The D.A. pawed at his face with his hands and groaned. "Awright. So does that prove he rubbed out that guy?"

Willie waxed impatient. "Let's look at it this way. There are very cold-blooded characters who can be hired to knock off any citizen for as low as fifty bucks."

SATCHELFOOT KELLY looked nauseated. "So all we got to do is find him and make him sing, you chucklehead! What rubout artist would put the finger on his employer knowin' all the time if he did he would be one of a duet at a hot squat affair? So maybe Brink didn't want to go through life with a long name and trimmed it down, and he didn't want anybody to think he knew a crook like Kish and was ashamed of bein' in the same football pitcher with a schoolmate who had disgraced the Harvards. So what if he—?"

"Shah-h-h-d up!" the D.A. screeched. "All of you git out of here!"

"I still think Brink is guilty!" Willie yelled back before he slammed the door.

Willie was that addled in the pate, he accompanied Satchelfoot to a nearby tavern for a snort or two.

"It adds up, Kelly," he told the flatfoot. "One swindler took the rap so the other swindler could look after the haul and maybe double it by the time he got out of stir."

"Willie, that routine is so old even radio crime program writers don't use it no more. Awright, so Brink had Kish on a spot. So let's prove it! Why don't you quit this business of yourn and go to work?"

"Oh, I've been of help to the cops more'n oncet," Willie sniffed.

March 19th. The cops put Slobodovitch on the grill and tried to help him remember. The citizen still insisted his

mind during those pertinent hours was a blank. He liked vodka and it always put him out like a light. He had lost more weekends than Ray Milland. He didn't kill nobody. William Klump sat in on the proceedings, his tongue in his cheek, and finally he lost patience.

"He is innercent, D.A. You are prosecutin' him. It is a disgrace!"

The D.A. had William Klump heaved out into the corridor. Willie was burning on a settee when Hard Hat Hafey came running.

"H'lo, Willie," he gasped. "There is a corpse in an alley near Chatham Square. Where's the D.A.? Where's everybody?"

The D.A. barged out with Satchelfoot Kelly. "You forgot they invented telephones, Hafey? Awright, git down there! One murder gettin' nowheres. Now we have got another."

The police jalopy squealed to a stop at the mouth of an alley and spilled William Klump and three legitimate flatfeet. They trudged into an alley, turned a sharp right and came upon two harness bulls ogling a citizen's corpse.

"Found him not more'n twenty minutes ago," a cop said. "He's been dead longer'n that."

"Two bullet holes in him where they would do the least good," the other said.

Willie spun on his heels, steadied himself and took a second look. The liquidated person wore a dark blue pinstriped suit, plaid shirt and saddle shoes.

"It is Zeff!" Willie choked out. "Almost a client of mine oncet. He was back in his rent and—frisk him, Satchelfoot."

"Zeff?" Hard Hat Hafey blew air through his nose. "Another pipe dream and another phony name! This is no other than Benny, the Blast, Brillo who has been suspected of more rubouts than a jungle has night crawlers."

"Yeah!" Kelly said. "Now I reckernize the rat. So they caught up with the punk! Willie, what kind of opium do you smoke?"

They went through the deceased's pockets after the corpse appraiser for the city testified that Benny the Blast had been bye bye for at least seven hours. They came up with a plane ticket to Toledo and three hundred bucks to boot. William Klump was atomized.

"Yeah? When he come to me with that preposition, he was nearly broke," Willie said. "So all at oncet he is all flushed like a babe snaps a garter in the middle of Times Square. Maybe this is a coincidents, Satchelfoot, that a certain party named Kish was rubbed out, the only murder we know of in town the last few days, and here is Benny the Blast in the chips. You git everythin' that was in his pockets?"

"Let's comb him ag'in," Satchelfoot snapped, and did. "Not a thing, Willie. Looks like—"

"Hey," Hard Hat called out. "Here is a Roscoe, Kelly. It looks like Benny unlimbered his artillery, but a little too late!"

"Awright," Willie yelped gleefully. "We will see did the bullets in Harry Kish come out of that Betsy. I'll show you who is smokin' opiums, Kelly! And who didn't see no football pitcher on a wall!"

AFTER the usual routine of taking pictures of the corpse and casing the ground in the immediate vicinity, the loser was packed off to the city's freezing unit. Satchelfoot Kelly hurried to Headquarters and, after a conference with the D.A., Lieutenant Schniff, and other boss lawmen, turned Benny the Blast's heater over to ballistics.

William Klump, however, remained in the neighborhood where the deceased had been rendered as such, and cased every poor man's Waldorf within a radius of eight blocks. He finally struck pay dirt in a hostelry reeking of exterminating compounds not far from the water front.

"Yeah, it's here on the register," a fat clerk told Willie. "H. Zeff. Toledo, Ohio. No record he checked out. So his stuff must be in his room. I remember him awright as we was ready to t'row him out on his ear couple days or so ago. Owed us—"

"I know," Willie said. "Room Nineteen, huh? You don't mind?"

"Here's the key, Klump. Detective, hah? Ha!"

Willie went up a flight of creaky stairs, turned left and stopped in front of a room marked with the drunken numerals one and nine. He inserted the key and stepped inside. There was an old simulated leather valise peeking out at him from under the sagging iron bed. He yanked it out into the open and

opened it up, found nothing but a bunch of duds badly needing rinso.

He went over to the rickety old commode and found a comb, a razor, three cigar butts and a crumpled piece of paper that had come out of a memo book. One edge betrayed the fact it had been perforated. Willie carefully spread the paper flat, gaped at the scrawled notation:

214 Woodlawn Place.

William Klump picked up the small sheet of paper by one corner and dropped it into his coat pocket.

"So I should give up and go to work, huh? Wa'n't the Hawkeye was in business, this case wouldn't never been solved. I wonder how the ballistricks are comin' out."

He felt itchy, decided he'd better get out of the Hotel Atavista. Doing so he asked himself who had rubbed out Benny the Blast, but was little concerned with the answer. Let the cops worry about that, and anyway a citizen who worked with radium could not expect to die from frost bites.

"An expediter, he said," Willie recalled. "I must look the word up."

The president of the Hawkeye spent half an hour in a lunch room, then gave the D.A. a buzz. "Willie!" the man said, "You were right. The slugs that knocked off Kish come out of Benny the Blast's gun. Now all we got to do is prove Brink hired the assassin, and how could we do that?"

"I wisht you cops would come up with some answers oncet in awhile," Willie sniffed. "Well, I'll drop by soon and see what I can do. You better let Slobodovitch loose or the city will git sued. And O'Dwyer says in the paper the city already has a bond of indebtedness that—"

"Drop by when you have time, Klump!" The phone banged onto its cradle.

William J. Klump took a subway uptown, then walked two blocks west toward the Friendly Hand Loan Co. Entering the shark's playground, Willie nodded pleasantly to the cute trick at the desk. "Is Brink in, sister?"

"If I was, I'd leave town and change my name, you clunk!"

"Too much name changin' goin' on," Willie said. "I ast a question."

The irate doll plugged in on Onslow Brink. She got the word to let the shamus crash the biggie's office. Willie walked in and hauled a chair up close to Brink's desk and sat down.

"Seein' any pitchers lately ain't there?" the loan wolf quipped.

"It was there," Willie said. "Brinkerhofer, fullback. Kirsch, center."

ONSLOW BRINK'S cigar twanged between his teeth like a plucked banjo string. "Huh?"

"The cops always wondered what become of a citizen named Inglerfritz who was supposed to have robbed widows with a skunk named Pasher. Kish's prints matched with the ones on file the cops got from Pasher. Kish—Kirsch. Brinkerhofer—Brink. It must be an awful nuisance rememberin' whicht name you want to use at times." Willie examined his fingernails. He sensed that the loan shark was taking shorter breaths. "Kish showed up and asked a character what happened to eighty grand and why he never come see him in jail. The character had to rub out Kish before he sang."

"So he did," Brink purred. "While he was playin' poker all night."

"Still hangin' on, huh?" Willie asked. "We just recently picked up a stiff downtown named Benny the Blast Brillo, only Benny was also usin' an alias, Hubert Zeff. The citizen who hired him to rub out his old swindle partner knew he was Benny the Blast, as by that name he hired out for such jobs. What is an expediter, Brink?"

"A man who gets things done quick," the loan arranger said. "Now look here, Klump, I've had enough insinuations."

"The bum was right. He expedited Kish awright." Willie grinned. "You paid him maybe five C's?"

Brink blinked. Willie knew he had scored a bullseye.

"Okay, prove I hired a killer to knock off Kish!" Brink snapped.

Willie Klump idly picked up a leather-covered memo pad from Brink's desk. It had Brink's name on it in little gold letters.

"I figure the pages are perforated, huh?" Willie said. "None of them tear off the same as others, I bet, if you matched them up. We took a memo off Benny the Blast, with an address jotted down, Two-fourteen Woodlawn Place. Your residents, huh? Now tearin' off a

page from this little pad, you got to leave a thumb print if you forget to wear gloves—"

Onslow Brink lunged toward Willie as the shamus quickly dropped the memo pad into his pocket. "Gimmie that or I'll beat your brains out!"

William Klump hopped clear of the desk and headed for the exit. Brink pulled out a drawer and Willie knew he was not just after spearmint. The private detective opened the door, looked into the faces of two very husky and hostile citizens, slammed it shut, and hit the linoleum just as Onslow Brink fired off his equalizer.

Willie knocked over a water-cooler and the big demijohn landed on Brink's left foot and brought a blood-curdling howl of pain from the loan shark. Hopping around on one prop, Onslow Brink cut loose with the Roscoe once more as Willie raced for the window. It led out onto a terrace graced with potted plants.

Brink, flanked by his cronies, moved out to the beachhead. Willie got one citizen dead to rights with a geranium, and then sought shelter behind a big tubbed rubber-plant. It looked like a stalemate and Willie wished he had not been so selfish about capturing dishonest persons. Even Kelly could have been of help at this time. Bullets kicked dirt out of the tub and into his face, and then Brink and his pal rushed.

Guns went off, but not those belonging to the enemy. Onslow Brink clamped a hand to his empennage and jumped a foot off the floor, and his gun arched over and landed in the tub, an inch from Willie's fingers. The private dick grabbed it just as Brink's flunkey yelled uncle. "Willie!" Satchelfoot howled.

"Yeah, it's me ag'in. I am glad you suspected this big punk at last." Willie staggered in off the terrace, ejecting plant dirt from his mouth. "Some time I got to remember to buy me a gun and git over my bein' scared of 'em."

"Okay, you dirty crooks, don't make a move!" Hard Hat Hafey yelped. "You bat an eye goin' out to the jaloppy and I'll shoot out the other one."

"Before you go, Brink!" Willie said. "Where's the pitcher of the Harvards? Nobody's goin' to make people think I see things I don't."

"In the supply closet," the loan wolf snarled. "Of all the rotten breaks!"

"Yeah, you hired a crooked citizen I was above havin' nothin' to do with. Benny the Blast," Willie said. "You will git charged with more'n interest up at Sing Sing, pal!"

TWO hours later, Onslow Brink, nee Osmund Brinkerhofer, alias Inglerfritz, confessed, not being able to remember if he had torn off that sheet of paper without having gloves on. He had faked the threatening letter. "Yeah, I invited Kish to my house and told him to take all the hootch he wanted, knowin' he was a souse and would get boiled. I said for him to use my bed close to the window as my wife was away. I'd be in later, I said. Yeah, he wanted forty grand or else. Half of what we took on that mine swindle and— I don't see how this was done. Ah, rats!"

"It is amazin' what kind of clients visit me," Willie said. "Even expediters. You should be ashamed, disgracin' the Harvards."

"Now you got to go to jail." Hard Hat laughed.

"Take the big punk away," the D.A. said. "Now, we got to find who knocked off Benny the Blast."

"Don't look at me," Willie said.

Satchelfoot Kelly looked at Willie wonderingly. "Some day you'll nab a character who skipped his rent. You'll find an asrology book on him with a doll's name inside the cover. Eva Braun. You'll go to the address that's there, too, and find the babe cleanin' a uniform with a swashticker on it, and sittin' on a big book called Mine Camp. In her closet will be all the latest plans of the atom bomb, and a letter to Adolph Hitler from the Kraut underground sayin' a submarine will be ready off Ambrose Lights at a certain time. And—"

Willie grinned. "That's enough. Even I ain't that lucky."

"Nothin's impossible now," the D.A. sighed.

"Only Satchelfoot," Willie Klump said. "I'll expect a slight fee and expenses of course, D.A. Send them to my office. See they are expedited. And good afternoon."

When the door closed behind Willie, the D.A. looked sympathetically at Satchelfoot Kelly.

"Stick around for a minute," he said. "I have a bottle in my desk drawer. We both could use what's in it."

A Complete Novelet

The man was still struggling, fighting back against Brett

Murder by Mirrors

By O. B. MYERS

Brett was a realtor, but he had no interest in plots six feet under—even if he got a pretty brunette for company!

CHAPTER I

Terror

MURDER can happen to anybody. It can strike silently, in the dead of night. Or it can explode in broad daylight in the middle of a crowded street, bowling over bystanders like ninepins.

Nothing could have been further from Brett Landon's thoughts than murder as he hurried across Penfield Square in the thickening dusk of early spring. He was thinking about business—the houses he had been looking over out in Clearwater Park, the lease on the Trask block, the Powell's mortgage.

If Miss Hoyt was still waiting for him, he'd get off a letter to the home office about that Powell mortgage, he decided. He wondered if that girl had come in again about rentals—the dark-haired one with the hazel eyes. What was her name? Susan Deal—that was it. Small houses to rent simply did not exist in this part of New Jersey, but he had told her the last time to try again in a few days, with a vague hope that by the third or fourth encounter he would get up nerve enough to suggest discussing the matter over a pair of cocktails in the Arlen Grill. She would, he thought, look very attractive across a small table. Then, thinking of her, he saw her ahead of him.

He had turned up State, where a few of the store windows were already lighted. The day's crowd had thinned out homeward. It was the dinner hour for most people and the sidewalks were almost empty. From the back, without seeing her face, he recognized the hat—a dark blue puff-ball with a rakish red feather. As she cut diagonally across to the left-hand side of the street, he quickened his steps. His office was over on Spring, but halfway up the block there was an alley that cut through alongside the Walker Building. He used it frequently, coming from the square. It saved him perhaps a hundred steps. If he caught up with her before he came to the alley. . . .

SOMEONE switched on the lights in the display window of the florist's shop just then. Against the soft glare he caught her profile and was sure of her identity. He snatched off his hat and had just reached out to touch her arm when she turned abruptly left. It took him by surprise. Although he often used that alley himself, he somehow had never expected her to know about it. He almost stumbled over her heels. Rounding the corner of the Walker Building, his arm still extended, he opened his mouth to speak.

Then hell blew up almost in his face.

In the half shadow of a doorway recessed into the brick wall of the Walker Building crouched a short, ominous figure. A gray fedora was pulled low on his forehead, the collar of a topcoat turned up about his chin. With one hand he held a wadded handkerchief to the lower part of his face. In the other he held something that spat lancing red flame and crashing thunder.

Brett froze on his feet, completely unable in those few seconds to understand what was going on. In the narrow alley the walls threw back the reverberations of the explosions so that it was hard to tell how often the gun fired. Through the echoing roar Brett heard the faint tinkle of breaking glass and the brief, chilling whine of bullets.

He felt, rather than saw, the girl at his elbow lurch against him. She spun half around, gave a quick, choking gasp, and toppled to her knees. A large fat bundle slipped from her hand, and her pocketbook spewed its contents on the floor of the alley.

For Brett, time seemed to stand still. His limbs were made of wood, his throat closed tight, his mind racing in a circle. He stared as if hypnotized into those eyes above the matted handkerchief. Dark and wide, they glared straight at him, full of terror and anguish and black, malevolent hate. Then Brett's brain and all of his instincts together hurled him flat.

Before he hit the concrete he was aware that the crouched figure had started for the other end of the alley at a run. Sprawled on the flat of his hands, he raised his head to see a coated shadow disappearing toward the twilight of Spring Street. Drifting smoke bit his nostrils sharply as he turned to the prostrate figure at his side.

"Miss Deal! Are you hurt?"

She rolled under his hand, but did not answer. Her breath was gagging and wheezing in her throat and her cheeks were chalky pale. A dark crimson blotch appeared on the concrete, just under her shoulder, and widened while he stared at it. He let her slump back on her face, as she had fallen, and pushed himself to his knees.

His strenth seemed to have evaporated. But when he looked toward the State Street end of the alley he saw a face, and then another, and before he stood up he heard the shrill of a police whistle from the distant square.

An hour later Brett sat stiffly in a chair in a room at Greenbank police headquarters. It wasn't exactly an office. There was a long, scarred table, half a dozen straight chairs such as the one he sat in, and an overhead light fixture that filled the room with a hard white glare. There were no pictures, but a number of bulletins and posters were thumbtacked to the walls. Any one of them might have concealed a recording mike. On the table were a couple of battered metal ash-trays, Brett's hat, and a telephone which was apparently used for outgoing calls only, since it never rang.

On the opposite side of the table sat the man who had introduced himself as Inspector Farlow. He had a long, lean face with a bony nose and a high forehead. His eyes, half hidden beneath heavy brows, slanted down at the corners. Most of the time he kept them fixed on the notebook opened in his hand.

"Now let's check these facts once

more," he said in his slow, tired voice. "Brett Landon, age 25, unmarried, living at Seventeen Maple Place. Office manager of Greenbank branch of Grinz & Shipley, New York real estate firm. Been with this firm just over a year. In the Greenbank office since last November. Right?"

Brett nodded stiffly. He felt as if he were sitting, moving, thinking, in a partial vacuum. The wings of Death had reached out and brushed his very cheek. That realization, sharper now, an hour later, than ever, over-shadowed every effort to get himself back to normal.

THE inspector eyed his notes further, and grunted unhappily.

"This description—gray soft hat, dark coat, handkerchief, rather short—would fit half the men in New Jersey. Can't you give us a little more to work on, Landon?"

Brett cleared his throat. "That's all I saw, Inspector. That—and his eyes, looking at me."

"His eyes? What color were they?" demanded the inspector.

Brett shivered, remembering. "I don't know. I think they were dark. They looked terribly excited.

The inspector's tone was not the least bit excited. "Why did he try to kill you?"

That was the question Brett had been dreading. Not merely because he couldn't answer it, but because it confirmed the horrible suspicion that had been growing in the back of the mind. So the inspector, too, thought those bullets had been meant for him!

"I don't know," Brett said in a strained voice. "I don't know why anyone should try to kill me. It's—impossible."

"It came pretty closed to being possible." The inspector gestured toward Brett's soft hat, which lay on the table between them. For the first time Brett noticed the two neat round holes, one in each side of the crown. He picked it up and fingered it gently.

"But wait!" he said, suddenly remembering. "I didn't have this on. It was in my hand—like this." He stood up, illustrating his position. "I was just going to speak to Miss Deal, when—"

At that moment one of the doors opened, and a man in a dark blue shirt looked inside.

"Regan is on the phone, from the hospital," he said. The inspector nodded, picked up the instrument on the table.

"Put Regan on this line," he said into it.

He listened attentively for some time, asked a couple of questions, and hung up, to meet Brett's unspoken question.

"By the luck of the devil, she's doing fine," he answered it. "She'd been shopping, and bought a sofa pillow. That's what she had in that package. The one bullet that would otherwise have killed her barely got through the pillow. Its thrust caught her right on the solar plexus. That's why she couldn't speak. But it didn't even scratch the skin. The other bullet that struck her tore a flesh wound in her upper arm. That may be noticeable when she wears a bathing suit next summer, but nothing more serious."

"Thank God," Brett said.

The inspector gave him one of his slanting looks. "You strongly interested in Miss Deal, Landon?"

Brett flushed slightly. "Why, no. No, I barely knew her." He explained that the girl had stopped in his office two or three times looking for a small house to rent. "I just hoped she wasn't killed, that's all."

The inspector made a note in his note book. "Well, she wasn't. That makes it attempted murder, instead of murder. Still pretty bad—especially if it was only the first attempt."

"What do you mean?" Brett said.

"I mean that the next attempt may be more successful—unless we can do something about it. Sometimes we can prevent a killing easier than we can solve it after it's happened. Naturally we'd rather. But we've got to have your cooperation, Landon."

BRETT threw up his hands. "But I've told you all I know!"

"Think!" the inspector commanded. "That little - man - you - can't - describe wasn't posted in that alley to blast away at the first person to come toward him just for the fun of it."

"No, of course not."

"Then he was shooting at either you or Miss Deal. The fact that he hit her may have been merely bad aim, I admit. But consider this: She is neither married nor engaged. She says she has no

disappointed suitors nor married lovers, and insists she hasn't an enemy in the world who might want to kill her."

"But neither have I," said Brett.

"Furthermore," continued the inspector imperturbably, "You used that alley frequently on the way to your office. Anyone familiar with your habits could have known that, and waited there to waylay you. But Miss Deal says she didn't even know the alley was there. She turned into it by mistake, thinking it was Mail Street."

"Anyone familiar with my habits could have waited for me on Maple Place, on my way home. That would be a quieter spot for a shooting than right in the middle of the business district."

"Not much difference at that time of the evening," said the inspector. "But perhaps your assailant had some special reason for choosing that alley. What was it?"

Brett shook his head violently. "I tell you I don't know. I don't know who he was, who he could possibly have been. I haven't the faintest idea why anyone in this world should try to kill me."

The inspector shrugged. "There must be some reason."

The door opened again. This time the police sergeant came in and handed the inspector an envelope with some notes scribbled on the outside. The envelope contained two slugs, one battered out of shape, the other in well-nigh perfect condition.

"Hm-m-m," mused the inspector. "Thirty-eight caliber. From an old-fashioned revolver, by the looks of it. By the way, Landon, do you own a gun?"

Brett shook his head. "No."

The inspector made some more notes in his book, and then sat studying them. Brett lighted a cigarette, but for some reason the smoke tasted vile in his mouth. It began to dawn on him that he was very hungry.

"Are you going to keep me here tonight, Inspector?" he asked.

The other man gave him an opaque stare. "Not unless you want us to. We could lock you up as a material witness, for your own protection, if you asked us."

Brett stared at the officer, and felt what seemed like a cool wind blowing down the back of his neck. He shook his head.

"I guess I can protect myself," he said. "But I certainly hope you can put your finger on that thug—and soon."

Inspector Farlow shrugged helplessly. "We've got to know something about motive first. There are probably five hundred men within ten miles of this room who could have had a thirty-eight caliber pistol, and could have been in that alley at five fifty-two this afternoon. But four hundred and ninety-nine of them lacked the motive to pull the trigger."

Brett nodded. "I see what you mean, Inspector." He picked up his hat, looked at the holes through the crown, and tossed it back on the table. "You may want that for evidence. I'll let you know if I dig up anything."

He had hardly gone fifty yards before he nearly regretted his decision. Halfway down the block a man emerged suddenly from a doorway, and Brett found himself flattening against the brick wall of a garage. The man hurried past. Brett cursed his cringing nerves, and went on.

CHAPTER II

Man in the Mirror

BRETT'S poise improved while he ate a slow dinner, almost returned to normal. But on his way home, he started three times down Maple Place on his habitual route, and each time turned back. Finally he walked around the block, hastened up from the opposite direction, and fairly plunged into the rooming house where he occupied a small suite on the top floor.

He slept poorly, waking frequently. A dozen times he told himself that the attack on him had been a mistake, a slip on the part of a trigger-happy gunman who was looking for someone else entirely. Although he assured himself in the morning that he had nothing to worry about, he nevertheless turned right instead of left on leaving the house, walked around the block, and ate his breakfast in a place he had never entered before.

At the office he tried unsuccessfully to bury himself in work. But there was not enough work. In addition to

Miss Hoyt, his secretary, his staff included a legal assistant who wrote leases, sales contracts, and deeds, and four salesmen.

Miss Hoyt was a bottle blonde with thick ankles and a perpetually harried expression. She stood by his desk.

"I waited until after six, Mr. Landon," she said reproachfully. "I thought you might want to write a letter about that Powell matter."

"Bring your book and I'll write it now," he told her, deliberately avoiding any explanation of why he had not got back to the office the evening before. When the letter was finished he tried to concentrate on his competitors' ads in the previous day's newspaper, but with no success.

As he strode toward the door he said to Miss Hoyt, "I'll be back in an hour," adding under his breath, "I hope."

He crossed Spring, but did not turn into the lower end of the alley. Instead he went on to the square and turned up State, as he had the evening before. A sentence kept running through his head: "The murderer returns to the scene of his crime."

The thought had the effect of slowing his steps. Just before coming to the upper end of the alley he turned abruptly left into the main entrance of the Walker Building. Crossing the lobby, he stood looking up at the framed building directory as if seeking a room number.

This was sheer stalling. Every name on the listing was already familiar to him. Grinz & Shipley were the renting agents for the Walker Building. Brett himself had negotiated many of these leases, and their rent checks came into his office around the first of every month. He knew the inside geography of the building almost as well as he knew his own room.

With a shrug he forced his reluctant feet to carry him out onto the sidewalk again. He sauntered to the mouth of the alley, and stopped. How different it seemed! Last evening it had been the most important corner of the universe, throbbing with action and violent emotions, the vortex of life and death. Now it was just an alley, a ten-foot strip of concrete between two buildings, dirty, gloomy, littered with refuse and ashcans.

By looking closely Brett thought he could distinguish dark stains on the concrete a few steps in from the corner, but they were already so scuffed as to be almost invisible. In the plate glass display window of the florist's shop, on the opposite corner of the alley from the Walker Building, there was a neat round hole, starred by fine cracks in the glass. Inside the window a couple of workmen were already busy repairing the damage there. Brett saw that they were installing a section of mirror. A square post, near the middle of the show window, had been boxed in by mirrors on all four sides. The bullet, piercing the window without breaking it, had gone on to strike the mirror. The mirror, being solidly backed up by wood, had shattered. That explained the distant tinkle of breaking glass that he remembered hearing.

THE glaziers had already swept out the fragments. While Brett watched, they lifted into place a new section of mirror, a foot wide and about five feet high. While one steadied it carefully, the other fitted and tightened the lag screws that were to hold it in place.

Brett gave a sudden start. He was standing in the middle of the sidewalk, near the corner of the Walker Building, on the exact line from which he had approached the alley the evening before. In front of him he saw a doorway, filled by a metal-sheathed door, which was closed. It took him a moment to realize that he was looking in that mirror, just installed on the post, and that the door he saw was the service entrance of the Walker Building, opening onto the alley. It was the very doorway where the short man with the gun had been standing, waiting.

It struck him immediately that if he could see the doorway from where he stood, then anyone standing in that doorway could see him, or would be able to see a figure approaching from the east, along State Street.

After a minute he sauntered into the alley, stepped into the doorway, and turned. Yes, the mirror reflected his gaze at just the right angle to show him the pedestrians in front of the Walker Building. A killer waiting here would have been able to spot his victim's approach before the latter even reached the mouth of the alley. But now Brett saw something else.

By shifting the direction of his gaze a foot to the right, he was looking, not into the mirror, but past the post, diagonally through the show window of the florist's shop. He saw without reflection the people passing to and fro on the sidewalk in front of the shop. From this spot, then, one could see a person approaching the alley from the west, and by looking into the mirror could also see a figure approaching from the east. And if two people came simultaneously from opposite directions, you would see them both simultaneously, and might easily suffer a moment of confusion.

It began to dawn on him what had happened. The killer had waited in this doorway. He had expected his victim to approach along State Street, must have expected him to turn into the alley. At five fifty-two his victim had appeared, coming along State Street from the west. Brett could picture the gunman, jerking out his weapon and clapping the handkerchief to his face. But at the same moment, Brett himself, coming from the east, must have been visible in the mirror. A superficial resemblance, perhaps, had been enough to start the confusion. It was heightened when Brett swung into the alley. The man with the gun, poised on tip-toe, keyed up to this moment, had been unable to sort out his reflexes, and had squeezed the trigger even while it was dawning on him that something was wrong.

Brett tried to rack his memory. There had been other pedestrians on State Street, but he had taken no notice of them. Brett could not remember whether another man, resembling himself, had been coming toward him from the west. At the moment of reaching the alley, with no forewarning of what was coming, he had been intent on nothing more than catching up with Susan Deal.

Nevertheless, a terrific weight seemed to have been lifted from his chest. He no longer felt as if he were stifling in a closed room, obsessed by unseen terrors. He strolled through the length of the alley, whistling lightly between his teeth.

"Why, as far as I was concerned, it was all an accident," he thought. "That guy wasn't after me at all! He probably never saw me before in his life, until he saw me in that mirror!"

Back in his office, he signed the letter he had dictated earlier, talked to a couple of his salesmen on the telephone, and then to Miss Hoyt.

"I'm going out to buy a new hat," he told her. "I think I've got it coming to me. Then I'm going to pick up my car at the garage and run out to look over that veterans' development in Clearwater Park. I won't be back till after lunch."

BRETT was at the wheel of his coupe, with a new light gray fedora cocked at a devil-may-care angle, before it occurred to him that Inspector Farlow would be interested in what he had discovered that morning. He stopped at police headquarters, but the sergeant on the desk told him that the inspector was out. On a case.

"What case?" demanded Brett.

The sergeant's eyes were opaque. "He'll probably tell you, when you ask him—later in the day."

Brett stayed out at Clearwater longer than he intended. In fact, he got so interested in the building project that was under way there that he spent half the afternoon with the construction superintendent discussing costs, priorities and mortgage values. In his car again, on the way back to Greenbank, he realized with astonishment that he had utterly forgotten for several hours his close call of the evening before. As the inspector had said, it was all a matter of motive. If you knew that someone was trying to kill you, it was natural to be jittery. But if it was only an accident—well, accidents could happen to anybody.

He came into Greenbank along Monument Avenue. When he found himself passing the hospital, he suddenly pulled into the curb and parked. It had occurred to him that someone else might be glad to hear of the conclusions he had drawn this morning. At the reception desk he asked if he might see Miss Susan Deal. The crisp young nurse handed him a card on which he wrote his name.

"Would you mind sitting in the waiting room for a minute?"

There were a number of other people waiting. They came and left while five minutes passed. Brett was studying some pencilled notes he had made on the back of an envelope, and so did not notice the man who stood in the side door, looking at him. When he raised his head, the man beckoned.

"You asked for Miss Susan Deal?"

When Brett rose, nodding, he said, "This way, please," and led Brett along a corridor.

Brett glanced at him, then looked again. He was a big, broad-shouldered fellow with rumpled brown hair and wide jowls, dressed in a dark suit. Suddenly Brett recognized him as the police sergeant in the dark blue shirt who had kept popping into the room at headquarters, last evening.

"Why, you're one of Inspector Farlow's detectives, aren't you?"

The sergeant's eyes crinkled at him. "That's right."

"What are you doing here?"

They turned a corner and approached a door. "Oh, we're sort of keeping an eye on the young lady," was the casual reply.

When the door opened, Brett saw at first nothing but a screen. As he stepped around it, the door closed behind him. The detective, rather to his surprise, stayed outside. It did not occur to Brett until later that he doubtless stepped into the adjoining room, to which a connecting door stood ajar.

The girl sat half erect in one of those adjustable beds, her hair a dark cloud against the pillows. Framed in this cloud, her face was pale as ivory except for two bright red spots in her cheeks which grew as she stared at him through wide, unsmiling eyes.

"Well, how are you today?" Brett asked cheerfully. "They told me last night that you were going to be all right, but I thought that I'd stop in and find out for myself."

"I'm feeling all right, Mr. Landon." The girl spoke almost without moving her lips. "My arm hurts, but the doctor says it's nothing serious."

Brett stopped by the side of the bed, smiling down at her. "I'm glad it's nothing worse. Believe me, I'm glad."

"I'm surprised you have the nerve to come in here and talk to her," said an icy voice from behind him.

Susan Deal stammered, "Oh—excuse me—this is my mother, Mr. Landon."

Brett turned. The woman who sat in the chair by the window was well-dressed, but not conspicuously so. Her graying hair was feather-cut, framing a round face that was Susan's with a few lines added.

"If you have to get mixed up with a lot of gangsters in your business," she went on without acknowledging the introduction, "you could at least try to keep innocent people out of the way of your shooting affrays. And when they do get hurt, you needn't try to drag them in deeper."

CHAPTER III

False Front

HE STUMBLED over his tongue in his astonishment. "But I—you don't—you mean you think he was shooting at me?"

"Well, he certainly wasn't shooting at Susan!"

"Of course not." Brett tossed his hat on a chair. "That's why I came in here. I thought you might be worrying about that. I went back to State Street this morning, and looked the spot over."

Quickly, he explained the conclusions he had reached after examining the scene. He even shifted a table and the screen to illustrate the layout, so that they would understand.

"So I'm convinced," he finished, "that as far as Susan and I are concerned, it was sheer accident."

Her mother had listened closely, but her expression did not soften. "Then why did you tell the reporters that Susan knew the man?"

Brett's jaw dropped as he stared at her. "But I didn't tell them anything. I haven't talked to any reporters!"

For answer she gestured toward a rumpled newspaper that lay on the foot of the bed. Brett picked it up. It was the Greenbank *Clarion*, and carried the article on the front page. It was brief, but the last line gave him a jolt.

Mr. Landon could not make definite identification, but it is believed that Miss Deal was able to give the police a description which may enable them to make an arrest shortly.

"You mean that you recognized him?" he exclaimed.

"No, no!" cried the girl in the bed. "I hardly saw him. I couldn't even describe what he was wearing, and I never told anybody that I could."

"But this—it says here—"

"It says there," interrupted her mother, "what you must have told the police yourself."

Brett turned toward her. "Mrs. Deal, I assure you, on my word of honor, I never told that to anybody; police or reporters, either. They've got it wrong, that's all. Somebody made a mistake, in printing that. We'll get it corrected in tomorrow's paper."

"And what good do you think that will do?" The elder woman got up and came over to lay her hand on his arm. "Mr. Landon, I think you're speaking the truth. I don't know exactly why, but I believe you. But do you see what this means? The man who fired those shots, whoever he is, believes that Susan can identify him."

Brett nodded his head slowly.

"A correction in the next edition won't help," the woman continued. "He may not even read it, and if he does, he'll still be suspicious. And as long as he believes that, Susan's life is in danger."

Brett tried to sound reassuring. "But the police—" he began.

Mrs. Deal tossed her head angrily. "The police! If you didn't give that statement to the press, then the police did. If they make mistakes like that, then I haven't much confidence in their protection."

Susan spoke from the bed. "Oh, nobody would want to kill me, Mr. Landon. At least, I don't think so." Her voice, trying to be brave, faltered a little. "But I am worried about my job. I'm private secretary for Judge Higgins. He's a politician, you know. He can't afford to have a scandal in the papers about anyone in his office being mixed up in an affair with a bunch of gunmen. He phoned just before you came, and mother said he sounded quite annoyed."

"Don't you worry about it," Brett said. "I'm going right over to see the inspector now." He picked up his hat. "I promise you I'll do everything I possibly can to clear this thing up."

Susan's smile followed him out the door, but after he was down in his car and headed for police headquarters he told himself he was a fool for offering that promise. He had succeeded in getting himself untangled from this shooting and its consequences, now he had plunged back into it again. He was a business man, and had more than plenty to keep himself busy in the real estate field. But that expression of helpless dismay in Susan Deal's eyes had been more than he could resist.

BRETT waited twenty minutes before being shown into Inspector Farlow's office. This was not the room where he had been questioned last night, but next door to it. Brett started immediately to explain his visit to the alley that morning, but the inspector held up his hand.

"You mean the mix-up between the view in the mirror and through the show-window? Very interesting, yes. But doesn't help us very much, does it?"

Brett's eye held a faint gleam of admiration. The cops weren't so dumb, after all. It had not yet occurred to him that a report on his conversation at the hospital could be, and probably had been, telephoned here while he was on the way.

"It helps me to understand that, as far as I was concerned, it was purely accidental," Brett stated flatly.

"I can see what you mean," nodded the inspector, "especially since you were already convinced of that fact."

"But look here, Inspector. That article in the newspaper. You told me last night that Miss Deal had no enemies who might want to kill her. Then what was the idea of telling the reporters that she could probably identify the man with the gun?"

The inspector opened his palms upward. "It was either that, or sit back and give up. Don't you see, Landon? We've got nothing to go on. I know that she can't identify the man. But if he thinks she can, he may try to approach her, to find out if she really knows his face, or to warn her to keep her mouth shut."

"Exactly!" said Brett. "What a spot to put her in!"

"She's in no danger," the inspector answered. "We've got a man watching her every minute. Nobody will get near enough to hurt her without Lee Ruskin knowing about it first."

Brett remembered the broad-shouldered man at the hospital, but still looked his doubts. However, the inspector changed the subject.

"By the way, Landon, that door that the gunman was standing in. You know where it leads to?"

"Certainly I know. We're agents for that building. It leads into the service

hall, from which stairs and an elevator go up to the floors above. There are back doors opening directly into some of the suites."

"Into, for example, the suite occupied by, er—" the inspector located a slip on his desk—"Acme Insurance Associates?"

A wary look came into Brett's eyes. "What do you know about Acme Insurance Associates?"

"I know that the name is nothing but a front for Benny Gaits. The front office is only a partitioned-off cubby-hole, with a receptionist to turn away callers who want insurance. But the big room in back—which can be reached from the service stairs, if the man at the peephole knows you—is a fully equipped horse parlor, with wire service and a book on every race in the country."

Brett showed astonishment. 'If you know that much, how come the place has never been raided?"

"Look, Landon." The inspector spoke earnestly. "I just work here. I work for the administration, who in turn work for the people. The people want horse parlors. If they didn't, they wouldn't support them. As long as they don't make any serious troubles, we let 'em alone. But if you disapprove of horse parlors, why doesn't Grinz & Shipley cancel the lease?"

Brett found himself on the defensive. "Why, it's purely a business deal, for the firm. As far as we know, they sell insurance. Do you mean that there's some connection between Benny Gaits' horse parlor and this shooting?"

The inspector shrugged. "If there is, I can't put my finger on it. I just wondered if you could suggest anything."

Brett shook his head slowly. "All I know about Benny Gaits is that he pays his rent promptly on the first of the month, and makes his own repairs and alterations. I haven't been in that suite of offices since he took the lease."

THIS line of questioning, while it led to nothing definite, stirred Brett's curiosity. When he got back to his office he dug out of the files the folder on Acme Insurance, and took it into his office. Among other letters of reference, submitted prior to the closing of the lease, he found one on the letterhead of the Monument National Bank. When he had read it, he called for his secretary.

"I didn't notice it at the time, Miss Hoyt," he told her, "but this letter from the Monument Bank is signed Wilton F. Hoyt. Is he a relation of yours?"

She stood by the side of his desk with her usual worried look, twisting her fingers nervously.

"That's my brother, Mr. Landon. He's been with the bank nearly eight years now."

"Oh, yes, that's right. I remember now. You told me."

She blinked uncertainly. "Why, was there anything—"

"No, no. I just happened to notice the name, that's all."

That angle seemed to offer no clue. Neither, for the next week, did any other. He was up against a blank wall where he could not find so much as a toe-hold. He visted Susan Deal at the hospital every day. He learned a great deal about her family, her friends, her tastes, her likes and dislikes. But though they discussed it backward and forward, from every conceivable approach, he could learn no reason in the world why anyone should wish to harm her.

One day, on his way back to the office after a late lunch, he got a queer shock. Coming from the square, he was striding up State Street when he saw a girl cut diagonally across the street ahead of him. She wore a short blue jacket and a hat with a red feather, and seemed to be in a hurry. For just an instant he had that eerie sensation that all of us have experienced—the feeling of having lived through that same moment once before.

Then he gave a snort. It wasn't Susan, of course. That girl looked familiar to him because it was Miss Hoyt. For a moment, the red feather had fooled him. But now, as she turned her head, the profile and the blonde hair were unmistakable.

He kept an even pace. When she came to the corner of the Walker Building, she turned into the alley. She too was on her way to the office. After a dozen steps, he himself swung left into the alley—and got a momentary surprise. Instead of being ahead of him, halfway to Spring Street, Miss Hoyt had disappeared. The alley was empty.

There was not time for her to have reached the far end and turned into Spring, even if she had broken into a run. Then he realized she must have entered the service door of the Walker

Building. He slowed, then shrugged and went on. It was the third of the month. She was doubtless checking on a few of the tenants who had not yet paid their rent.

At three-thirty that afternoon Brett went out to attend a meeting of the tax assessors committee at City Hall. It lasted longer than he had expected, and it was close to five o'clock when he called his office from the booth in the corridor.

"Miss Hoyt? I'm still at City Hall. Any messages?"

She hesitated a moment before she replied. "No, sir. No messages for you. Are you coming back here, Mr. Landon?"

Brett was slightly disappointed. Susan had gone home from the hospital that morning, the wound in her arm nearly healed and the effects of shock wiped out. He had rather expected that she would call him at the office. He had hoped, in fact, that she would ask him for dinner at her mother's apartment.

"Yes, I'll stop in. But don't wait for me. You can go along home, if you want to."

He had left his car parked on Spring Street. From City Hall on foot it took him no more than ten minutes to reach the office. Miss Hoyt was gone, the outer door locked. Inside, he switched on his desk lamp and sat down to study the notes he had made at the meeting. His head was full of figures when his telephone rang.

"Mr. Landon? Is this you, Brett?"

"Yes, that's right. Now wait. Let me guess. It's Mrs. Deal."

"You do know my voice, don't you? Well, I'm glad I caught you, this time. How is Susan?"

Brett did not yet quite catch her drift. He laughed. "That's what I was just going to ask you. How is she?"

"Why, isn't she there with you?" Mrs. Deal's tone was puzzled, rather than anxious. 'I thought you'd both be back before this. That's why I phoned before."

"Before?" exclaimed Brett. "Did you phone here before?"

"Why, yes. About twenty minutes or half an hour ago. I talked with your secretary. I explained to her about Susan meeting you out on Walworth Lane, and she just said you weren't back yet. I wanted to tell Susan to bring you home to dinner."

Brett stopped doodling on the calendar pad and frowned in puzzled surprise. Miss Hoyt had told him there had been no calls. Anyway you looked at it, it spelled trouble.

CHAPTER IV

Danger—Corpse!

KEEPING the anxiety out of his voice, Brett said:

"Now wait a minute, Mrs. Deal, please. You'd better start at the beginning. What's this about Walworth Lane?"

"Why, one of your salesmen called up in the middle of the afternoon. At least I thought he was one of your salesmen, because he knew we were looking for a house. He told Susan about this one on Walworth Lane, six rooms, and a bargain at six thousand, he said. He urged her to come look at it right away. A buy like that doesn't last long these days. So she made a date to meet him there at four o'clock, and took the bus. He said you'd be there, too, at that time, otherwise she wouldn't have gone alone."

"What was his name?" asked Brett sharply.

"I don't know. I think he told Susan, but she didn't mention it to me. Why—didn't he call from your office, Brett?"

By this time Brett was sure there was something very wrong, but he didn't want to frighten Susan's mother unnecessarily. "He might have. I've been out. Did you tell all this to Miss Hoyt?"

"Yes, I explained about the salesman calling. She just said that you were out, and I thought she meant that you were at the house, with Susan. She said she'd tell you when you came in."

For the moment this puzzled Brett more than anything else. Why had Miss Hoyt carefully kept quiet about all this?

"She went alone, you say? Where was that police detective?"

"Oh, he left after coming home with us this morning. He said to call Inspector Farlow's office if any stranger tried to contact Susan. But he wasn't a stranger. He was one of your salesmen, I thought. Oh, Brett, where is Susan?

She ought to be home by this time even if she wasn't with you."

"Yes, I—what was that address again, Mrs. Deal?"

"Let me see. It was Number eighty-six, I think."

Brett was rising on the balls of his feet, still holding the phone.

"Hold everything, Mrs. Deal. Something's queer about that. I'm going out there right away, and find Susan. Don't worry."

He was rounding the corner of his desk as he threw the telephone into its cradle. He snatched up his hat, slammed the door behind him, and went toward his car at a fast trot. He roared the length of Spring in second, snaked recklessly through a mass of five o'clock traffic in Penfield Square, and swung into Hurley Boulevard with his weight on the accelerator.

Like any good real estate man, he knew his territory. Number 86 Walworth Lane would be the superintendent's cottage on the Walworth estate. The main house had been for years one of the show places of Greenbank, a fifty-room mansion surrounded by eighty acres of beautifully landscaped grounds. Since old man Walworth had died, two or three years ago, the property had been vacant, tied up in litigation. The estate was on the market as a whole; asking price, $150,000. Brett knew that. He also knew that it could not be sold piecemeal; the superintendent's house, for example, with a half an acre of ground.

Walworth Lane mounted a steep knoll, then curved into a secluded valley. On his left now ran the ornamental iron fence that enclosed the estate. Beyond a grove of trees he came to the ornate gates. They stood open, as the last departing caretaker had left them. Inside, a drive bordered by maples curved off between smooth lawns. The superintendent's cottage stood by itself, about fifty yards up the drive, but just inside the gate a car was parked.

A closed car, silent and ominous, long and black. It was empty.

A little farther on he stopped, leaped out, and cut across the unmown grass toward the house. It had the desolate look of a house that has not been lived in for a long time. Weeds grew in the flower beds, every window was blank and staring. An enormous cob-web over the front door sent Brent around the house toward the rear.

Back there he found a paved sun-deck, from which long French doors opened into the hall. One glance showed him that a single pane of glass had been broken in the French doors, at a point where it would be easy for a hand to reach through and manipulate the lock. Sure enough, when he tried the knob, the door swung in easily. He stepped in, avoiding the fragments of glass that still lay on the floor of the hall.

HE SAW immediately that he was not the first to thus step carefully past that broken glass. The house was empty of furniture, and dust lay thick on the hardwood floors. In that dust he saw a confusion of footprints, some large, some small. When he spotted the unmistakable mark of a high heel, his throat tightened.

He opened his mouth to call, but something restrained him. He took a few steps on tiptoe.

The afternoon light was waning, and most of the shades were lowered. But he hardly needed light. He had been in so many small houses of this type that already he could guess the layout. In front of him stairs rose to the second floor from the front of the hall. On his right would be the kitchen, in front of that, the dining room. On his left, through that wide archway, would lie the living room—

His breath caught in his throat, and the skin behind his ears tingled. That archway was flanked by tall, fluted columns, and on the column nearest him, halfway up, something seemed to be tied. He stepped quickly now, into the wide doorway, and there froze in horror.

The first thing he saw was the man sprawled in the middle of the living room floor. He was a youngish man with black hair and heavy-set features, dressed in a pin-stripe blue suit minus the coat. There were two ragged holes in the front of his vest, and his face was almost unrecognizable by virtue of the gap just below his left eye through which blood and brains oozed to swell a growing puddle on the dusty floor.

Even in that first quick glance Brett noticed the dead man's arm. The shirt sleeve had been scissored off just below the shoulder, and his left forearm was swathed in bandages which somehow had the look of amateurish application.

Then Brett turned to the figure lashed to the archway column. "Susan!"

She didn't hear him, because she was quite unconscious. She had been trussed up with her arms lashed around the post behind her. Now she had slumped half to her knees, most of her weight supported by the rope around the column. Her head sagged sideways, and her hair tumbled about her face, but Brett could see the ugly, darkening bruise on her cheekbone. Bound in a position of intense discomfort and strain, she had, apparently, been slapped and buffeted until, simply unable to take any more, she had fainted. He could hear her breathing in the stillness, short and shallow.

The man on the floor was dead. Brett did not give him another look. He passed an arm around Susan's waist, relieving the strain on the clothesline, and simultaneously on her shoulders. On the end of his watch chain was a combination pen knife and nail file. After he had sawed through the line, he looked in vain for some comfortable spot to place her limp form. The room was absolutely devoid of furniture, and there wasn't even a built-in window seat. The best he could do was stretch her out full length on the floor.

On his knees beside her, he straightened out her arms and combed back her hair with his fingers. He needed water, but knew that the water supply in the house would be shut off. She sighed deeply, and her head rolled from one side to the other. Brett looked up and he saw the coat of pin-stripe blue hung from a window latch, where its owner had put it. He folded it into a wad, and slipped it under Susan's head for a pillow. "Susan," he said. "It's all right now. I'm here."

All the time he had been conscious of a penetrating, acrid odor in his nostrils. Now, abruptly, he realized what it was. He had smelled the same smell that evening in the alley. It came from the biting fumes of powdersmoke. The shots that had perforated the man in the blue suit, then, had been fired very recently. Perhaps only a minute or two before he had walked in. In that case, the killer—

The thought had barely formulated itself in Brett's mind when he heard a sound. Without shifting his feet, he straightened up to full height. There was a faint *click-click,* as of hard heels on stone paving blocks, then a louder *plock-plock* on the floor of the hall. In another instant he was staring at the last person in the world he had expected to see.

She had moved as far as the entrance to the living room before he found his tongue. "Miss Hoyt. What are you doing here?"

"I came on the bus. *Agh-h!"*

She was staring wide-eyed at the sprawled figure in the middle of the floor. Her stringy blonde hair was disarranged as if she had clapped her hat on hurriedly, and her features seemed more gaunt and haggard than ever.

"I don't mean how. I mean why," demanded Brett. "Why did you come out here? Did you know something was going to happen? Why didn't you tell me about Mrs. Deal's call?"

SHE wasn't looking at him. Her eyes were darting around the room toward Susan, still unconscious.

"She—she shot him!" croaked Miss Hoyt.

"She!" cried Brett. "Don't be insane! She was unconscious, beaten up. And besides, she—"

His voice trailed off as he followed the direction of Miss Hoyt's frozen stare. For the first time he saw the revolver. It was a .38 with a long, blued-steel barrel, of the type frequently carried by police and bank guards. It lay on the floor, close to the foot of the fluted column, right where it might have fallen if it had slipped from Susan's nerveless fingers. His secretary spoke again, in a thready, scraping whisper.

"He's dead—Benny Gaits is dead!"

Without looking again at that prostrate form, Brett knew she was right. That was Benny Gaits in the pin-stripe suit. And he was certainly dead. But that didn't explain things. But wait—Benny had been wounded. There was a bandage on his arm. When had that happened? Where? In the alley, a week ago? Had Benny been the man coming from the west along State Street—the man the gunman had been waiting for in that service doorway? Then Benny must have lured Susan out here to find out what she knew about the killer, because Benny hadn't recognized the killer himself!

All these conjectures rushed through Brett's head as he stood staring at the gun on the floor. He was beginning to

learn something of motives, but still not enough to see what had happened here. There was Susan, there was the revolver —but no. That was the wrong line. It had to be wrong. There was a whole link missing somewhere. What was it he had been thinking just before Miss Hoyt walked in? Oh, yes. That the shots had just been fired. That the killer might therefore still be in the house.

He turned slowly on the balls of his feet. Benny had been in the living room, facing Susan. The bullets had struck him in the chest, and the face. Therefore they had come from the hall. The killer had been in the hall. He had pressed the gun in Susan's hand, to give it her fingerprints, then dropped it to the floor. When he had seen or heard Brett's approach, he would have hidden.

Moved by instinct rather than reasoning, Brett glided stiffly past the fluted columns. Under the angle of the staircase was a built-in coat closet. Its door opened into the hall, directly opposite the living room. It had a solid glass knob. Brett's eyes, riveted to that knob, told him that the layer of dust which covered it was smeared, uneven. Without thinking further, he reached out and jerked the door open. A charging head drove full into his stomach.

Rocked back on his heels, gasping for breath, he saw a short figure in a dark topcoat reel past him. He heard Miss Hoyt scream, "Will! Will!" at the top of her lungs.

The man snatched the revolver from the floor, and, still in a half crouch, whirled to face Brett. "Out of my way, Landon, or I'll shoot!"

Brett realized that he stood between the gun and the French windows, the only quick exit from this locked house. The face that confronted him was contorted into a mask of desperatoin and hate. It was the face of a stranger, and yet with something tantalizingly familiar about it. The man moved closer.

"No, Will, no!" Miss Hoyt was screaming again. "Don't shoot. Don't kill any more! I'll confess! I'll tell them everything—that it was all my fault, not yours! Stop, Will—no!"

Brett stiffened, his eyes narrowed as he backed up a step. He was face to face with murder, and no mirrors involved. But somehow this time it did not frighten him, perhaps because he had been aware of its approach. Or perhaps because he was fighting to free Susan from an unthinkable suspicion.

"Put that gun down!" he said.

Miss Hoyt, by a desperate effort lowered her voice. "No, Mr. Landon, no! Let him get out of here. He only tried to help me because he's my brother. He never meant to shoot anybody. Let him go. He can hide somewhere, and I'll—I'll explain everything."

Brett heard her words, but they made no immediate impression on him. His whole consciousness was focused on the man's face, twisted by the violence of his emotions, his eyes like hot coals.

For a moment no one moved. Then, as if a knife had ripped the canvas from top to bottom, the picture was rent by a sharp cry from the living room where Susan had recovered consciousness.

"Brett! Where are you?"

The rigid scene dissolved instantly. The man with the gun, caught by surprise, turned his head. It was the sort of opening for which Brett had been waiting. He sprang forward. But Miss Hoyt saw his movement first. She threw herself in his path, clutching his arms.

"No, you can't! Run, Will—quick! *Agh-h!*"

Miss Hoyt's body was driven sharply against Brett as a roar echoed through the empty house. He thrust her aside, as her brother, making for the French doors, darted past him.

Brett grabbed an arm. There was a confused and desperate scramble. The revolver blasted again, this time straight up. Then Brett's blow, swung for the chin, landed low, but with enough force to drive the other man back toward the stairs. The back of his head struck the edge of the open closet door, momentarily dulling his reactions. When Brett hurled himself bodily, they both went down together. The revolver clattered on the floor. Brett, on top, pinned two writhing wrists to the floor, and sat heavily on a heaving stomach.

"Be still!" he commanded, panting. "It's the end of the road for you!"

The man was still struggling, fighting back, when the French doors flew open with a crash and Sergeant Lee Ruskin, followed by two others with drawn guns, rushed in. It was all over then.

IT WAS nearly eleven when Brett left police headquarters. He drove direct to Susan's apartment, where her mother

admitted him. Susan was sitting up in an easy chair in the tiny living room. She held a cold pack to her cheek. Her other bruises were hidden under a pale green negligee that at some other time would have taken Brett's breath away. She looked up at him anxiously.

"Are you all right, Brett?"

"Of course I'm all right. A bump here and there. That's all. The question is: how are you?"

"Me? I'm terribly curious, so I must be all right. Will you please tell me what this is all about?"

Brett sat down on the edge of the couch and took her hand in his.

"It all started six months ago, with Miss Hoyt," he said. "She was playing the ponies in Benny Gaits' horse parlor and, of course, she lost. At first, a little. Then, more than she had. Her brother, Will, an assistant cashier in the Monument National Bank, covered her losses by forging cashier's checks to Benny Gaits' order, and then hiding the shortages in his accounts. She promised, over and over, to let the races alone, but she always started again."

"And she kept on losing?"

"No. That's the strange part. She began to win. She won back the twenty thousand that her brother had stolen for her, and more, too. Naturally, Benny Gaits wasn't very happy about that. But he had Will in his clutches—because the last cashier's check Will forged Benny had never put through. He kept it in his pocket, and held it over Will as a threat of exposure."

"So Will Hoyt tried to shoot Benny Gaits that afternoon?"

"Yes. He was desperate. His defalcations at the bank had never been discovered. He had the money to wipe them off the books and stay honest—yet he couldn't do it as long as Benny held that check. He claims that he only intended to frighten Benny, not to kill him, that first time. But he certainly shot to kill this afternoon."

"How did he find Benny out at that house on Walworth Lane?"

"The first time your mother phoned my office, Susan, she explained to Miss Hoyt all about your going out to Walworth Lane. Miss Hoyt knew, as I did, that that house wasn't for sale at six thousand, and she also knew that I was at a meeting at City Hall. So she guessed right away that it was Benny Gaits, looking for information. She was frightened, and called her brother at the bank. He wasn't sure how much you could tell Benny, either, so he started out there right away. When Miss Hoyt left the office, later, she took a bus. I must have passed her on my way."

Susan's mother added, "After I talked to Brett, I called up inspector Farlow. That's how the police got out there."

"And a good thing you did," said Brett. "I was beginning to have my hands full." He leaned toward Susan. "Did you see Will fire the shots that killed Benny?"

She shook her head. "I was pretty groggy by that time. He had just hit me in the temple. I heard the explosions, from behind me, and I passed out."

"And you didn't know that he pressed your fingerprints onto the revolver, and then dropped it under your hand?"

"I must have been unconscious."

"Well," said Brett, "it's not important now. Will Hoyt has made a full confession. Accountants are working at the bank now. They have found the twenty-five hundred dollar shortage, represented by the check in Benny's pocket, and they'll probably find traces of the other amounts. Hoyt's career is ended."

"And his sister?" asked Susan.

"The hospital thinks she will live, but will always be a cripple. The bullet lodged in her spine."

Susan shuddered. "That reminds me. I'll probably be without a job myself tomorrow morning. When Judge Higgins reads about this in the papers, he'll be convinced I was mixed up with a fast crowd somehow, and he'll never let me come back to work for him."

"That's fine." Brett began to grin. "You're out of a job. I need a secretary. How about it? I won't expect you tomorrow morning, but say, perhaps, by —Monday?"

"Why, Brett, I think that would be swell! Do you think I could learn the real estate business?"

"You could learn to stay out of horse parlors, anyway." He lowered his tone. "They always say that it's bad for business to hire a good-looking secretary and then fall in love with her. I wonder how it's going to work to fall in love with her first and then hire her?"

From Susan's expression, she seemed to think that it was going to work out all right.

Ivor's face hardened in cruelty and he leaped—and the gun in Gina's hand fired

ALIAS MRS. IVOR

By BARRY PEROWNE

The only evidence against her is a sketch made by an artist and Gina Macaire must gain possession of it!

HUM of a car, traveling fast; rumble of timbers as it swept over the bridge in the wood; hiccup of gears changing down. Before Gina Macaire, in the panic certainty of pursuit, had time to slip in among the trees, the headlights swiveled round the sharp bend and shone full upon her—a slim figure in a belted tan coat and soft velour hat.

The thin rain gleamed silver. At each side of the road the tall firs seemed to wheel back as the car came on, slowing. She knew it was going to stop, but she kept walking—absurdly, as though she could outpace the car, as though she didn't guess that the shot in the closed house had been heard and that Basil Ivor's body had already been discovered, as though there were still some hope of escape for her!

Next second, the headlights slid past, and the car pulled up. It was a roadster. The door opened and the head and shoulders of a man leaned out, twisting round —silhouetted against the blaze of the lights—to look back at her.

"Going to town?" he said. "Can I give

you a lift?"

The matter-of-fact inquiry was so unexpected to Gina, so much an anti-climax, that her breath, which she had been holding without realizing that she did so, escaped her in a little gasp. Her heart began to thump again.

"I—" She hesitated. Then, clutching at any straw to put distance between her and the silent house back there among the firs, she said in a low voice, "Thank you."

Instinctively avoiding the headlights, she walked around the rear of the car, where the tail light shone ruby on the wet road. The driver, leaning over from his seat, held the door open for her. Turning the collar of her coat higher, she ducked into the seat beside him. The door clicked shut, and the car purred forward.

"Nasty night," the driver said amiably. "You were aiming to catch the last bus from the corner garage?"

"Yes," Gina said.

THIS was the first she had heard of a bus service from the corner. She had no plan, only a frantic need to put behind her the sight of Basil Ivor lying face down on that shining parquet floor among his dust-sheeted furniture.

"You wouldn't have made the bus," the man beside her in the car said. "The last one leaves the corner at ten."

He gestured at the dashboard clock. It was nearly ten now. Ten o'clock. In another hour or so, if she had kept to the old arrangement they had made, she would have been meeting Basil Ivor at the airport. But not now. She wouldn't be meeting him now because he was dead.

Dead, dead, dead clicked the windshield wiper.

He was dead because she hadn't kept to the arrangement.

As that hour when they were to have gone away together had grown irrevocably nearer, she had been tortured by doubt—doubt of herself, of him, of his love; doubt as to whether the antagonism of her father and Aunt Edith to Basil Ivor, because of his reputation, really excused this runaway marriage.

She had felt an overpowering need to see Basil, to talk to him, to be reassured as only he could reassure her. At the airport, it would be too late to talk. There would be no chance. Once there, she would be committed—her life, her whole happiness.

Click, click, click went the windshield wiper. A tremor ran through Gina, uncontrollably, as she remembered her abrupt decision not to wait till it was time to go to the airport, but to take a taxi and drive straight out to Basil's house.

That she would find him alone there, she knew, for he had told her that he was sending his servants away today, and he would lock up the house himself and come on from there in his own car, garaging it in town and taking a taxi to the airport.

At the gates of his house, she had paid off her own taxi. She walked up the short drive. The front door had stood wide open, light streaming out. She had stepped into the hall.

The rugs had been rolled up, the furniture shrouded in dust sheets. On the table stood an open suitcase, packed and ready for closing. Beside it lay a small registered parcel post package, which, from its shape, she recognized at once.

The package contained a gold-chased fountain pen and pencil that she had bought for Basil only the day before. She had wanted his initials engraved on the gift. When the clerk had said that that would take a few hours, and had asked if he should mail it to her, she had said, on an impulse—

"Address it to Mrs. Basil Ivor." And she had given Basil's address.

It had amused her to think how the arrival of a package so addressed would intrigue and puzzle Basil. And how, when he handed it to her on the plane, she would be mysterious about it. She would never let him guess until they actually were married and she opened the package and gave him the gift, that it was a little, special present from the bride to the groom.

Just seeing the package there on the table in Basil's hall had brought back to Gina something of the happiness and certainty she had felt only yesterday. She had crossed to the table, smiling to herself, and had slipped the package into the pocket of her coat.

It had been then, as she was about to look around and to call to Basil, that she had noticed, pressed down between a folded silk dressing gown and a pair of

soft red-leather slippers in his open suitcase, a small automatic pistol. The thing had puzzled her.

WHY should Basil carry a weapon? She had pulled it out of the suitcase, wondering. It was in her hand when suddenly she heard his voice.

He was speaking on the telephone in one of the rooms off the hall. He must have been waiting there, with the receiver to his ear, for the call to come through.

There had been few words said, and those were hurried.

But they had been enough to dynamite her every illusion. They had been enough to tell her more than she had ever dreamed about the character and motives of Basil Ivor. He didn't love her. He loved her father's money, and he loved the prospects she had. That was all.

It was to a woman that Basil Ivor had talked on the telephone—to some woman!

When, after a minute, he had come walking briskly into the hall and had seen Gina standing there, he had stopped dead. Then, quickly recovering himself, he had come toward her, smiling and easy and tall, with his lean, dark, distinguished face, and his crisp hair very slightly gray at the temples.

"Why, Gina!"

Vivid in her memory was the change in his expression as he glanced from her face to what she held in her hand—the sudden hardening and cruelty, then the cat-swift lunge he made. There had been a kind of jerk at her wrist, a thunderclap of sound, and then silence.

Click, click, click, click went the windshield wiper, indefatigably.

"Hey," said the man beside her in the car, "you're shivering!"

She couldn't help herself. "I—I got rather wet," she said.

She clasped her hands tightly together, trying to still her tremors. At once the thought shot through her mind that she had worn gloves. No fingerprints.

"Lucky I came along," said her companion. "Funny, but whenever I'm late with stuff and I have to run it into town myself to make the deadline, it always seems to be a dirty night."

"Yes?" Gina said.

She was thinking of the automatic lying on the parquet floor, where she had dropped it. She was thinking of the lights, which she had switched off, and of the snap of the springlock as she had closed the door behind her.

"I'm an illustrator," said her companion. "I live out here, way back six or seven miles, past all those near mansions scattered around up in the wood, because I've got country tastes. Can't stand cities. My name's Hal Jessop, by the way."

"I think I've seen your work," Gina said, only because she sensed that he was waiting for her to tell him her own name.

He chuckled, dipped his headlights for a car approaching. They had by now swung out onto the highway.

"Pardon me if I doubt that," he said. "I'm a specialist. I question whether you'd read the sort of stuff I illustrate."

She was thinking tensely that with luck it might be days, even weeks, before Basil's body was discovered.

But she forced herself to say lightly to this irrelevant person at her side, "Why? What sort of thing do you illustrate?"

"Murder stories," said Hal Jessop.

She checked a cry.

Hal Jessop chuckled. "Whenever I have to make these night runs to town," he said, "to get stuff in on time, I'm always expecting something exciting to happen. You know, when you've been sweating out sinister stuff at the easel all day, you get kind of keyed up, kind of in a heightened mood."

"Yes," she breathed.

Hal Jessop, just then, cried out suddenly and savagely, spinning the wheel hand over hand to the right as there ran out obliquely across the road, almost under the car's bumper, an Irish setter dog, loose and hunting nose down, coat shining copper in the glare of the headlights.

THE locked wheels screamed. The car rocked, bumped, skidded to a halt. Gina's forehead came in violent contact with something smooth and cool, unyielding. She threw up her hands to her face.

The sound of the car's engine, still running, spun away into a dizzy black distance. It seemed to hover there faint and far for a space, then spiraled back, swelling in volume, as a phenomenon Gina couldn't immediately identify.

She listened intently to the nearby humming in the dark, trying to account for it. Then she heard a click. The sound

ceased, and she became conscious that she was sitting crouched forward, her face in her hands, her eyes closed.

"Ye gods!" said a voice. Then, "That pooch'll never be closer to it!" Then again, sharply, "You all right?"

She felt a touch on her shoulder. She drew her hands away from her face and looked up. Headlights shone ahead along the roadside curb. In the car a dashlight snapped on, making her blink. A young man in tweeds, hatless, with a brown keen face and blond untidy hair, was looking at her anxiously.

She tried to smile.

"I'm all right," she said, but her lips trembled.

She felt suddenly faint, and she had to lean back in her seat.

The young man peered close at her. "You must have hit your head on the windshield," he said. "The right temple there. It hasn't broken the skin, but you're going to have quite a bruise, I'm afraid. Gosh, I'm sorry about this. You look pretty white. I'd better get you home, if you'll tell me where to go." He smiled. "You didn't introduce yourself, you know."

She felt very comfortable but weak. She wondered vaguely what he was talking about.

"Didn't I?" she asked. "How remiss of me!" Her voice seemed remote to her. "I'm—"

She stopped. Wait a minute? What was this? She knew perfectly well who she was. She was Gina Macaire. But she seemed to have an uneasy feeling that there was some reason—she couldn't quite think what it was—why she mustn't tell anybody so.

He was looking at her intently. "What's the matter?" he said. She saw him swallow. "Don't you remember?"

That seemed the easiest way. Till the reason for this queer feeling she had about telling her name came back to her, just say she didn't remember.

She shook her head.

"Ye gods!" said the young man again, very softly this time, almost under his breath. He looked dreadfully worried, then his face cleared. "Look," he said, "have you got anything in your pockets? Just feel in your pockets, will you?"

She felt delightfully vague, as if she couldn't concentrate at all. Why should he want her to feel in her pockets? But she felt in them, humoring him, and drew out a handkerchief from one and a small unopened package from the other.

He pounced on the package with immense relief.

"A registered package. It's come through the mail to you. This gives it to us. Mrs. Basil Ivor."

He read out the address, but she wasn't listening. Basil Ivor! Tension seemed to creep up through her nerves and her muscles, driving out the cozy, lax feeling.

Basil! Basil lying face down on that shining parquet floor, among his dust-sheeted furniture. Now she remembered. Now she knew why she had felt that she mustn't tell anybody her name.

It was like coming out of a happy sweet sleep to terrible reality.

She had killed a man.

"We'll be all right now," said Hal Jessop reassuringly. He put the package back in her pocket. "You live back up in the wood there. Don't worry, Mrs. Ivor. Relax. I'll have you home in a very few minutes."

He reached for the ignition key.

"No!" She caught at his wrist. "No! I mustn't go back!"

He was desperately startled. "But why?"

She couldn't tell him. She shuddered.

Very gently, he said, "You mean, you can't remember?"

She seized on that.

"There's some reason. I can't remember. But I mustn't go back. I mustn't!"

HER voice caught. She began to cry. She felt as though her heart were breaking. She wept in an utter abandonment of grief, pressing her hands to her face. But she couldn't shut out the picture of Basil lying dead.

After a long time Hal Jessop murmured as though to himself, "Where do we go from here?"

Gina fought to regain control of herself. She must think. Probably they wouldn't execute her for a man like Basil Ivor, a coward, lying, scheming, heartless.

But there would be a trial. All the ghastly implications of a murder trial! It was late to think of her family now—her father and Aunt Edith—but think of them she must. This would shatter them.

She simply had to fight. She couldn't just tamely give herself up. She would

pay all the rest of her life for what had happened tonight. She would never be happy again. But if she crossed her bridges as she came to them, and she could just somehow avoid arrest, at least she wouldn't make others share her wretchedness.

She dabbed at her eyes with her handkerchief.

"I'm terribly sorry," she said. "I shall be all right. Please take me into town and drop me somewhere."

Reluctant, doubtful, he turned the ignition key and started the engine. He began to drive. He drove slowly, frowning.

After a minute or two, he said, "Mrs. Ivor—"

Passionately, she wished that he wouldn't call her "Mrs. Ivor."

"Mrs. Ivor," he said, "it's just a sort of hiatus. A gap. You've no idea, no sort of clue, why you should have this feeling about going back?"

She had to keep it up. She was committed, but only until she could get rid of him.

"It's temporary," she said. "I shall be all right when I've rested. If you'll just drop me off at some hotel—"

"Don't you think you ought to see a doctor first?"

"I don't want to see a doctor!" In her alarm her voice was sharp. She tried to soften it. "All I want is just some rest, some sleep. Don't you see?"

"If we could just figure out," said Hal Jessop, "why you're scared about going back."

He was obtuse. She loathed him with every nerve in her.

"I'll be all right," she said. "It'll come back."

"For the feeling to be so strong," he said, "there must be some mighty sound motive back of it. Maybe you were running away. But then, wouldn't you have had a bag or something? I don't know. If there were some way I could take a snoop around at the house, find out what the situation is there without giving away that I know where you are—"

Panic leaped in her. Why must she be afflicted with an illustrator of murder stories?

"I tell you I shall be all right!" she said.

"Look," said Hal Jessop reasonably, "I can't just dump you in a hotel and leave you. I feel a responsibility. You can understand that. There's this missing part in your memory. If I can find out what's behind it, give you back that link in the chain without betraying your whereabouts or committing you to any course of action that—" He broke off. He stared ahead for a moment, then exultantly snapped his fingers. "I've got it," he said. "I've got it!"

The car leaped into speed.

Gina was frantic. "What *is* this idea?"

He glanced sidelong at her, smiling. "I keep a small room in town. I use it sometimes as a studio. I'm going to take you there and—"

"And what?"

"You'll see."

All she could see was that there was nothing she could do save cross her bridges as she came to them. Ahead, there hung in the night sky the effulgence of the city's lights.

IT WAS an unpretentious room that Hal Jessop kept in town. It was almost an attic, with a sloping ceiling and a wide low window looking out on the distant flicker of electric signs. It was furnished with a divan bed, a shabby leather armchair, a screen, a big studio easel, and a table littered with pencils, paintbrushes, bits of charcoal, ink bottles and paint tubes. Dusty portfolios and squares of cardboard of all sizes were stacked around the walls.

"I can't offer you a thing, I'm afraid," said Hal Jessop, "except whisky."

"I don't want anything," Gina said.

"Then sit there," said Hal Jessop. He put his hands on her shoulders, urging her gently down to the divan. "And take your hat off." He took it off for her, smiled down at her. "Relax," he said.

He untied the tapes of a dusty portfolio, took out some squares of cardboard, dropped them on her lap.

"Take a look through those," he said.

Bewildered, she looked at the drawings. They were portrait sketches, done in colored pencils, all of girls. There was both freedom and delicacy in the drawings. They were full of movement, attractive and lifelike. But what, Gina wondered wildly, had they to do with her?

She thrust them aside onto the divan and looked at Hal Jessop. He was sitting in the leather chair. He had a drawing board planted across the arms. His right hand moved to and from the

table as he snatched up pencil after pencil, sketching with lightning rapidity.

He glanced up at her, grinned.

"Don't move," he said. "This won't take a minute. I'm supposed to have rather a flair for likeness. Years ago before I became celebrated for the more gruesome type of murder illustration, I used to infest the livelier cocktail joints and restaurants. I used to sketch the lovelies with the prosperous escorts. I used to get quite good prices from the escorts.

"A rolling stone," pursued Hal Jessop, "I financed my travels in those days by calling at any house that reeked of wealth, showing specimens of my work and getting a commission to sketch the ladies of the establishment." He chuckled. "Do you begin to catch on?"

"Catch on?" Gina said. She felt as though she were dreaming.

Jessop picked up his drawing and held it at arm's length, studying it and her. He made an alteration. Then he tossed the drawing board aside and rose to his feet.

"Cast your eye over that," he said.

It was she herself who gazed back at her from the square of cardboard—her shoulder-length amber hair, her dark-lashed hazel eyes, her small, straight nose, and full, rather wistful lips—a perfect likeness.

"But why?" she said blankly. "Why this? I don't understand."

Hal Jessop went to the door, opened it, removed the key, brought it back, and dropped it into the pocket of her coat.

"There," he said. "Now listen. If you're running away from something, you're better off here than in a hotel. You don't have to register. You're going to stay here tonight. Nobody in the world knows where you are, except you and me. You've got the key. There's a delicatessen across the road where you can buy breakfast. You couldn't be safer."

"But you?"

"I," said Hal Jessop, "shall push those belated illustrations of mine under the door of my agent's office, which is what I came in to do, and then drive back home. Tomorrow morning I shall return here. On the way I shall call at the house in the wood."

"No!" Gina exclaimed.

"Just listen," said Hal Jessop. "I shall call at the house in the wood. I shall knock at the door. When it's opened, I shall go into my sales patter, showing these specimens."

He picked up the half-dozen drawings from the divan.

"And this one!" He took the drawing from Gina and laid it on top. "It will presumably," he went on, "be recognized. Whoever it is at that house—your husband, I imagine—will probably start asking questions. I shall say it's just a picture of a girl I drew casually some time or other in some cocktail bar or restaurant. I don't know her name, never spoke to her in my life.

"But it'll give me my chance, you see, an opportunity to get an idea of the situation. The reaction to the picture ought to tell me much. And I shall keep my eyes open. I may pick up some clue that'll bring back to you the reason for this feeling you have about returning there. Yet I shall give nothing away. D'you see now?"

SHE tried to steady her whirling thoughts. He would find the house closed. He would get no answer to his knock. He would learn nothing.

"By noon," said Hal Jessop, "I shall be back here. Maybe when you've slept, you'll find that you've returned to normal. You won't need any information I may bring. On the other hand, if that hiatus is still there, then maybe it'll turn out that I shall bring just the clue that'll fill it in for you."

His eyes were alight with his plan. He cupped a hand under her arm and gave it a friendly pressure.

"Don't worry," he said. "Just go to bed and go to sleep. Give yourself a chance." He went to the door, glanced back, smiling. "Noon tomorrow. Sleep well, Mrs. Ivor," he said.

He was gone.

All other thoughts were swept from Gina's mind by the realization that she was at last alone. She stood tense, waiting, listening. Then she put on her hat. Again she listened for a moment, then crossed quickly to the door, clicked it shut behind her, ran down the dimly lighted staircase.

Glancing back as she stepped again into the thin rain of the street, she saw on the glazed glass fanlight over the hall door the figure eight.

"The end of Mrs. Ivor," she thought.

She began to walk quickly.

Not by chance was it that her father and Aunt Edith were out when finally Gina reached home. She had made her arrangements with Basil Ivor on the basis of a night when her folks had an engagement for the theatre and supper.

She crossed the big, softly lighted hall and went straight upstairs to her own room. Only then was it, as she was taking off her coat that she remembered that she still had the key of Hal Jessop's studio. She felt the key in her pocket.

Poor illustrator of murder stories, he was going to have something really to mystify him when he found the house in the wood closed and deserted, and on returning to the studio, he found that his Mrs. Basil Ivor had vanished.

She began to undress.

It might be weeks before Basil's body was found. When it happened, what a hue and cry there was going to be for Mrs. Basil Ivor.

The clerk in the store where Gina had bought the fountain pen would have a tale to tell. The baggage which had been sent ahead addressed to Mrs. Basil Ivor at the destination she and Basil had planned—the trunks were new, everything in them was new, since she hadn't dared send her own things, for fear Aunt Edith would notice—would add to the mystery of the Mrs. Ivor.

The taxi-driver might remember the fare he had driven out to Basil's house tonight. Strangest of all would be the story told by the man who illustrated murder tales. The longer it was before Basil's body was found, the less clearly would these people be able to describe the fabulous Mrs. Basil Ivor, and the more their descriptions conflicted the better would be Gina Macaire's chance. For she did have a chance.

Who was there to associate her with the mysterious Mrs. Ivor? She and Basil had been circumspect throughout in their association because of her family's attitude toward him. If she persuaded Aunt Edith to come away with her somewhere, very far away—

Gina took a cold shower, got into bed, and switched off the light. Softly through the house, from the clock in the hall, hummed the chimes of midnight.

LYING there wide-eyed in the dark, Gina knew that all the castle of hope she had been building up was airy stuff, an illusion. Hal Jessop would tear it down.

Though he had been kind to her and gentle, he had shown himself also to be resourceful and determined. He might not be at all content to come away without information from the house in the wood. When he failed to get an answer there, he might force a door or window and enter.

Her heart beat with measured sledge hammer strokes.

He would find Basil's body and go straight to the police. Not with some mere verbal description of Mrs. Basil Ivor. But with a portrait sketch to be blazoned over the front page of every newspaper in the country, and it was a breathing likeness of Gina Macaire.

She shook.

As sure as death, that sketch was going to put the handcuffs on her. Not in a few weeks or a few days but in a few hours. For, if Hal Jessop broke into the house in the wood, it would be well before noon that he did so. The story, illustrated by Jessop, would be in the afternoon papers.

Softly the handle of her door turned. She lay rigid and tried to simulate the easy breathing of sleep. Aunt Edith! After a moment the door closed noiselessly. She turned in torment. No sleep for the hunted. . . .

Up to five o'clock on the following afternoon, nothing had appeared in the newspapers about the house in the wood.

Gina sat at the counter of a dingy lunch wagon with the latest editions before her. She was very pale. There were shadows under her eyes. She was hatless and wore the belted tan coat she had worn yesterday.

For hours she had wandered the streets, hardly knowing what she was doing or where she was going. She wasn't trying to hide. She had no thought of flight.

There could be no flight from that picture of Hal Jessop's. She just couldn't put in this time of waiting under the eyes of Aunt Edith. When the thing appeared in the papers, she would give herself up. Yet, here at five o'clock, there was still nothing in the papers.

It was, of course, just possible that Hal Jessop had not forced an entry into the house in the wood.

It would make little difference save to delay the issue. The picture remained.

If it weren't Jessop who found Basil's body, he would still, when the story came out, take the picture to the police. Today or a month from today, once in the hands of the police, the picture was fatal to her.

Once in the hands of the police—

It was strange how her heart, which all day had seemed too tired to pound, began to pound now.

If Jessop, getting no reply at the house in the wood, had not broken in but had merely shrugged and come away, what then? He would have returned to the studio, where he was to have seen her at noon. He would have had the pictures with him.

Getting no answer at the studio either, he would—if he hadn't a second key—presumably have got one from the janitor. And when he found her gone, well, what could he have done except shrug that off, too. It was highly probable that he would have tossed the pictures down in the studio.

He didn't live at that studio. He only came there occasionally.

It was quite likely that the picture, which could be fatal to her, was lying at this moment in an empty studio.

Almost of its own volition her hand stole to her coat pocket and to the key there. Suddenly she rose and walked out of the lunch wagon.

NOW it was getting dark. Everywhere were noises, people hurrying, and the flash of lights. New editions came on the street. Gina bought each one. Nothing. Six o'clock still nothing.

She walked on, hurrying now. She walked faster and faster. She came to the street where Hal Jessop had his studio. More slowly she walked along, looking up at the numbers on the fanlights, till she came to number eight.

The number showed faintly against the dim light in the hall. If only he had a telephone, so that she could call from a booth, to make sure he wasn't in! But she remembered from last night that there had been no telephone in the studio.

She stood hesitating. In her dreadful need she had to go on. She *had* to. She mounted the steps into the shadowy porch. Her fingers hovered over the handle. She turned it. The door opened. She stepped again into the dim hall.

Her heart thumped. The edges of the key cut her hand in her pocket, she gripped it so tightly.

She began to mount the stairs. There were a good many flights of them. She heard voices. She heard a radio playing. A door opening suddenly almost shook a cry from her, but it was only a woman putting milk bottles out on the landing.

She reached the top floor, and there before her was the door of Hal Jessop's studio. Quite near was the switch for the landing light. She turned it off. From under Jessop's door, no crack of light showed.

She switched on the landing light again. She was trembling violently.

Inch by inch, she opened the door. A faint, bluish light coming through the window from the far electric signs pulsed in the studio and yielded to the light from the passage as she pushed the door wider.

The light glimmered on a white square of cardboard standing on the big studio easel, which was at an oblique angle to the door. Instantly her eyes fastened upon it. She felt for the light switch. The light flashed on. The picture sprang into detail. It was not her picture.

"Ye gods!" said Hal Jessop. He leaped up from the divan, blinking. "I thought you'd just stepped out. I've been waiting for you since noon. I must have fallen asleep."

He broke off. Gina's eyes were riveted on the picture.

Hal Jessop said eagerly, "Does it mean anything to you? I put it where it'd catch your eye. I thought it might fill in that hiatus." His voice sounded far off to her. "He wouldn't listen to my sales patter or look at my pictures," said Hal Jessop. "I did the sketch from memory after he'd slammed the door on me."

The room whirled round Gina. The pencil sketch was of Basil Ivor, with his lean, dark, distinguished face, and his crisp hair very slightly graying at the temples. It all receded dizzily before her eyes.

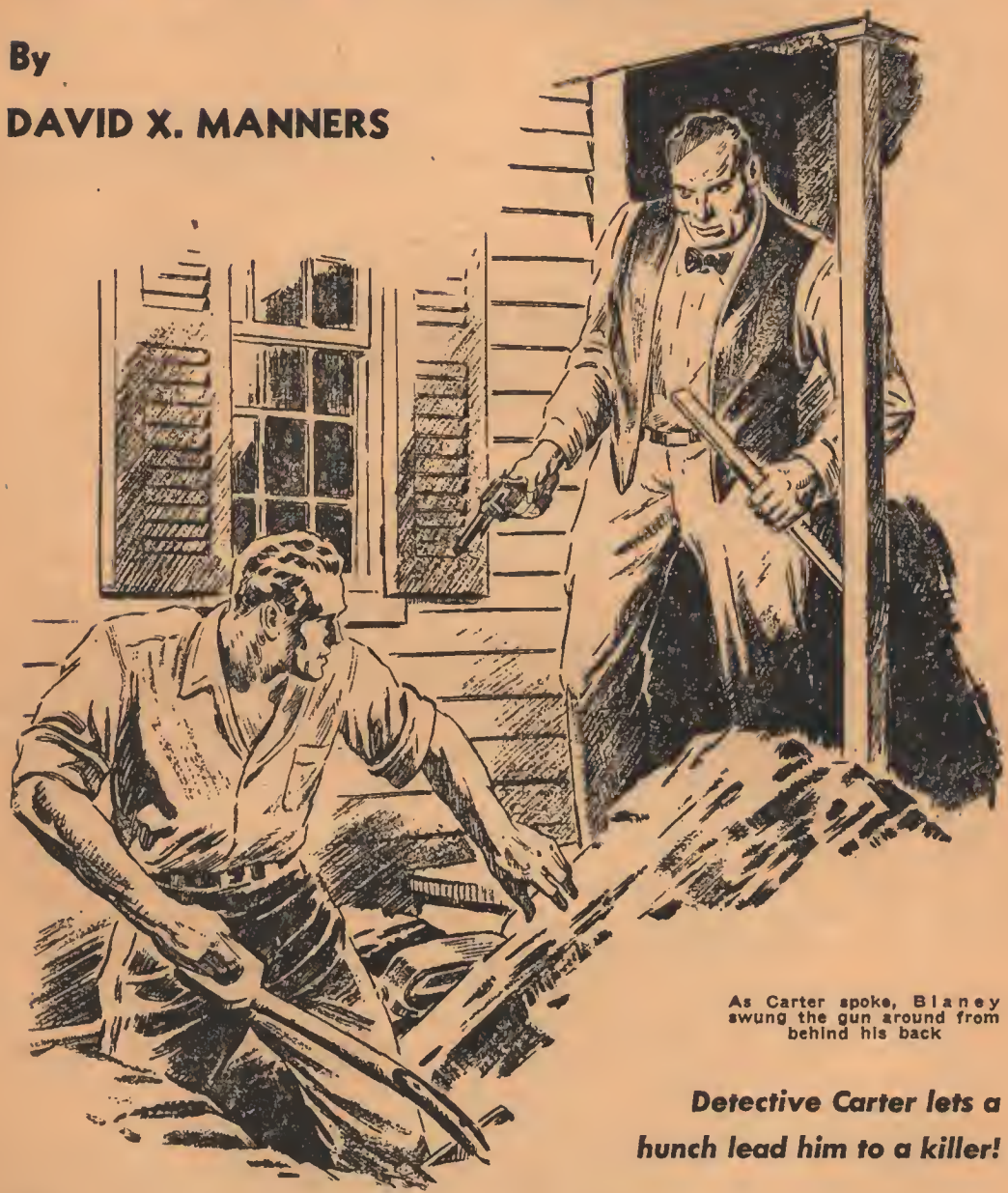
"He was in a terrible rage," said Hal Jessop. "He had his arm in a sling." His tone changed. "Mrs. Ivor!"

She felt his arm go around her, supporting her. She let her forehead rest most gratefully against the rough tweed of his jacket. She felt as if she could stay this way forever. It was so good—so good to be safe!

DIG IT DEEP

By

DAVID X. MANNERS



As Carter spoke, Blaney swung the gun around from behind his back

Detective Carter lets a hunch lead him to a killer!

IF AT first you don't succeed, try, try again, applies to many endeavors. But nowhere is it more exasperatingly apt than in police work—particularly where a murder is concerned.

Detective Carl Carter was thinking that as he braked his coupé to a stop in front of Len Blaney's house. He had certainly tried, tried again on this case, and if ever that corny bromide was going to pay off, it had better come through soon. He turned the volume of his two-way radio down low, but did not switch it off. Then he stepped out of his car and slammed the door.

A man shoving a grass-cutter across the lawn stopped his labors and looked up.

"Hi, Carl," the man called, as Carter came up the walk toward him.

Len Blaney, the man who spoke, was in his middle forties and at the peak of his powers. In two short years he had turned a decommissioned war plant into a million-dollar appliance factory, and plainly he thought he could do anything. He was mildly contemptuous of almost everything and everyone, including Mike Moynahan, the man who had put up the money for his endeavor. Carter nodded at Blaney.

"Is this the way you spend your Saturday afternoons, Blaney?" he said, pleasantly enough, though he wasn't at all happy inside about the way things were going.

Blaney answered with a grin and mopped his great, rubicund face.

"Relaxation," he said. "It's one of the keys to success."

Carter smiled ruefully. "I'm afraid I wont be able to relax until I find out what happened to your partner," he said. "Mind if I look around again?"

Carl Carter had to admit a certain peculiar admiration for Len Blaney. The fellow was clever, competent, and he had a sense of humor. Which made him potentially more dangerous in Carter's book. Guys who had a sense of humor always were.

"I haven't objected to your tearing up my home these past two weeks, have I?" Blaney said. "I won't start objecting now. But if you don't mind I'll tag along and heckle. I'd like to know what happened to Moynahan myself."

"I'll tell you what happened to him!"

IT WAS a sharp, crackly voice that had spoken. Carter and Blaney turned quickly in the direction of the fence. They saw a bearded, straggly-haired oldster leaning across the pickets. He was waving an accusing finger at Blaney. Tobias Wrenn, the neighbor who lived on the other side of the barrier, had figured in this case from the start.

"Moynahan was murdered," old Wrenn declared. "Right in that house there." His hair was bristle-white, but his eyes gleamed as brightly as a boy's. "I saw Moynahan when he got here that night. Blaney, I heard you and him quarreling right after that. I kept watching, but Moynahan never left your house. He's still there, on your property, hidden away somewhere!"

Tobias Wrenn's voice trailed off as, without waiting for a rebuttal, he turned back to his own little cottage where he lived alone.

Len Blaney's face and neck had flushed to a deep red.

"Meddling old fool!" he muttered.

"First witness for the prosecution," Carl Carter answered, but the touch of levity did not restore Blaney's good humor.

Detective Carl Carter did not think Tobias Wrenn was a fool. In fact, it was the oldster's unshakable testimony that Moynahan had never left Blaney's house that had convinced Carter the key to Moynahan's disappearance lay within the boundaries of the picket fence enclosing Blaney's home.

"I did quarrel with Moynahan," Blaney said. "I told you that. I was always quarreling with him. Mike was a thick-headed, stupid little lout, and he'd have run our firm to ruin if I'd given him half a chance. But he left here within fifteen minutes after he had come that night, and that old goat, Wrenn, is blind or crazy—or both." Blaney chuckled. "But I'm glad Mike disappeared, and I'd crack open a celebrating bottle of Scotch with you if I knew he was dead. That would give me free rein to run Blaney and Moynahan, Incorporated, without being forever dragged back by him."

Detective Carter didn't answer. He turned into the house and began his work, paying no attention to Len Blaney, hovering close behind.

Carter didn't take samples from the sink-trap or the house drains this time. Samples taken immediately after the reported disappearance of Moynahan had failed to produce evidence of any blood that might have come there from the killer unsuspectingly washing his hands. But Carter scrupulously searched the under side of the sink as well as all the under surfaces of the kitchen table and chairs, and beneath every drawer in the house for traces of blood. Blood was sometimes found in strange places, and killers, more than once, had been known to wipe their hands on just such surfaces.

He searched all walls and floors for unusual stains. Bloodstains were not always brownish red. They might be green or blue or black or grayish-white at times, particularly on wallpapered or painted areas containing chemicals

which had combined with the blood.

The detective rapped on all walls, floors, and ceilings, but found no evidence of hollow recesses or concealed openings. In the basement floor and walls he found no indications of recent alteration in the concrete. The furnace ashes, of course, had been subject to minute analysis at the beginning of the investigation, but Carter now probed such unlikely places as the hot water heater and the furnace ducts.

It was late in the afternoon when he turned and found Blaney still standing smugly behind him.

"What important clues against me have you found?" Blaney taunted him.

"You'll find out soon enough," Carter said, walked past him, and out of the house.

"If I were a killer," Blaney called after him, "it really would be unfortunate for you, wouldn't it? Without a body, you could never prove there was a murder. You could never prosecute me."

"But I'm going to find the body," Carter promised, and looked back at Blaney with an even stare. But he knew his words sounded hollow.

There wasn't much to look at outside the house. There was a bed of shrubbery along the front, but outside of it and a concrete driveway leading down into the basement garage, the entire surface of the yard was covered by thick, heavy sod that obviously had been in place for years. There was a small tree in the yard, and Carter was aware that a tree smack on top of a grave might be convincing camouflage on occasion, but this thirty-foot blue spruce was obviously not of that sort.

On hands and knees, Carter examined every square foot of the sod. He took the lid off the large garbage can set near the back porch, and rolled the can away to see if there might be something under it. There was only the bare spot where the can apparently had been standing for years.

He let handfuls of dirt from the front bed of shrubbery dribble between his fingers—and had a sudden hunch.

HE TURNED and there, still, was Blaney's face over his shoulder.

"Mind if I dig a hole in your lawn, Blaney?" he asked.

"I might." Blaney chuckled, and his heavy face quivered. "But I think it will be worth the fun of seeing you sweat. You'll find tools in the basement."

Carter selected a spade, a shovel, a post-hole digger and a tarp. Carrying the implements, he walked out on the lawn. Spreading the tarp, he went to work.

The first three feet were easy digging. The land in this section of the country was overlaid by a thick layer of fine loam known as loess. The spade went in effortlessly. Then, abruptly, Carter struck a layer of shale.

Blaney looked down into the pit when he saw Carter stop digging.

"Find something?" he asked.

"Frankly, yes," Carter said. He studied the shale at his feet. "When I was looking at that bed near the house, I noticed there was some shale spread on it, along with the loam. It struck me then, Blaney, that if you dug a grave, there would be the question of what to do with the dirt that was displaced by the body. And why, if you buried a body, you'd want to dig deeper than three feet—especially when the digging becomes much harder after that depth. I'd like to measure something, Blaney. Have you got a ruler in the house you could get me?"

"Sure," Blaney said, and in a moment he was gone.

Carl Carter used the brief period of Blaney's absence to take care of an important detail. When Blaney reappeared with a ruler in his hand, Carter was back again near the hole he had dug.

"Here's the ruler," Blaney said. But he made no move to come down to Carter with it. And his right hand, strangely, was held behind his back. "Come and get it."

"I don't want it," Carter said. "I don't need it. I'm sure of what I wanted to know. The reason a grave might have to be dug deeper than three feet, Blaney, is because Moynahan's body wasn't buried lying down. If a body were buried, more or less standing up, for example, the evidence of the grave might be a bare space no larger than the width of a man's shoulders. A neat, bare little space that might be covered conveniently and inconspicuously, Blaney, by—a garbage can!"

With a quick, sure movement, Blaney swung the gun around from behind his back.

"Okay, Hawkshaw," he said. "That

winds this up. You've won the first round, but there's still another round coming up. In a week or a month, when your body floats up on our river, they'll figure you did yourself in because you couldn't solve this case."

CARTER looked steadily at the black, deadly muzzle of the gun. He smiled a small, tight smile.

"I'm glad you brought out your artillery, Blaney," he said slowly. "That really does wind things up. You did kill Moynahan then, didn't you?"

Blaney was on top of the world again. The brainy guy no one could touch.

"Yes, Carter, I did!" he boasted. "Too bad it's not going to do you any good to know."

"Wrong again, Blaney," Carter said. "The second round has already come up and you've lost it, too. Why do you think I sent you in the house for that ruler, Blaney? Reason Number One: So you'd bring out your gun—which I knew you had—and convict yourself. Reason Number Two: So I'd have a chance to hurry down and put in a little call to Headquarters on my two-way radio."

From the sides of the house, two groups of bluecoated policemen had suddenly appeared. Blaney choked on a futile curse.

"You're a dangerous man, Blaney," Carter said then. "A worthy opponent. I never would have tried to tackle you and that gun all by myself."

Headliners in Our Next Issue!

TOPS is the word for FISH FOR MURDER, by Wyatt Blassingame, the novelet of suspense and mystery which leads the parade of fiction headliners in our next issue! Ed Parker's brother died in a mysterious explosion aboard a fishing launch—and Ed didn't know whether his death was really due to an accident, or whether it was part of a prearranged murder plan. When Ed began to investigate, he found himself in serious peril as startling revelations came to light. Look forward to FISH FOR MURDER—it's the mystery story catch of the year!

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Logan's gun pounded as I went off my chair fast

AND LET THAT BE A LESSON!

By ROBERT SIDNEY BOWEN

Chet Lacey saves an old man from sorrow and a young lady from folly — but almost doesn't save himself from death!

HE HAD opened the office door so quietly I guess he was inside five or six seconds before I realized it. And when I did, I wasn't pleased at all. He was the seediest looking guy you ever saw in your life; about a hundred and six years old, and as scrawny as they come. In a stiff wind his baggy clothes would blow away, and he'd be pinched. He looked like just another bum come in for a touch. I was tempted to ask him which one of the local down and outers had passed the word to him that Chet Lacey, Private Investigator, was always good for something.

Instead, though, I raised one hand to forestall the sad story, fished out a half a buck and tossed it to him with the other.

"Okay, Pop," I said with a knowing

smile. "Happy days."

He let the half buck clunk down onto the rug and roll away, and stared at me as though I'd given him a punch on his crooked beak.

"Sir!"

The authoritative way he said it made me sit up and look at him good.

"Come again?" I said.

He drew himself up to his bony six foot one or two, and glared at me down his nose.

"I did not come here to receive alms, Mr. Lacey, but to offer you money for your professional services."

That one floored me, and the usually nimble-minded Lacey stared down until the nine count to get reorganized.

"My error," I said, and waved at a chair. "Sit down. What's your name, pop?"

He made me wait until he had seated himself, and crossed his thin arms on his chest.

"My name," he said sternly, "is Harrison B. Harrison, sir!"

Never-forgets-a-face Lacey you can call me, now! Yeah! All I had done was toss a half buck at an old gink who had a million bucks for every inch my coin had traveled—and a couple of railroads, and coal mines to boot. Well, as I came up for the third time I made a valiant effort.

"I'm terribly sorry, Mr. Harrison," I floundered. "But, you see . . . that is . . . I mean . . ."

The twinkle that came into his watery eyes made my tongue trail off into silence.

"Forget it, Mr. Lacey," he said. "It's quite all right. A great number of people—er—do not care for my style of dress. I like it however. So that's that!"

He nodded for emphasis, and that took the twinkle right out of his eyes. Brother, did they become cold and businesslike! I could readily believe the story of how he had started in with nothing a few decades before, and knocked hades out of everybody until he had everything. A very mean, tough, and from-the-floor-swinging gent had been Harrison B. Harrison—and still was, with his eyes.

"I want you to find a woman, Mr. Lacey," he got down to brass tacks. "My granddaughter, Helen Fenton Harrison, to be exact."

WHEN he spoke the name something began to stir in the back of my head. I mean, a bit of memory that wouldn't come forward for inspection. I let it rest, looked at the old boy, and nodded.

"I see, sir," I said. Then, "How long has she been missing?"

"Three days," he told me. "Since Friday night."

"You've contacted her friends?" I wanted to know.

He made a little gesture with one hand.

"All of them. No one I've got in touch with has seen Helen since Friday evening."

"Any kidnapping notes?" I asked bluntly.

He seemed to hesitate for a split second or two. But I wouldn't have bet on it. He shook his head.

"I had better tell you, Lacey, that my granddaughter left the house because of an argument we'd had," he said slowly, and looked away from my eyes. "She lives with me. We are the only two Harrisons left. I'm . . . I'm very fond of Helen. But on some things we do not see eye to eye."

"Such as?" I asked, because the little bit of memory walking around in my head was beginning to click.

"That is unimportant!" he snapped, and fished a hand into his inside jacket pocket.

"Have you been to the police?" I asked, wondering if I was just a second choice guy.

He stopped fishing and fixed eyes on me that made me swallow. "I handle my problems in my own way, Lacey," he barked.

Which of course made Harrison B. Harrison a very sensible man in my estimation—for coming straight to me, I mean. Then he pulled a photo envelope out, slid out the contents and dropped it on my desk.

"That was taken six months ago," he said briskly. "She hasn't changed since."

I took a gander at the picture of Helen. It was full length, very clear, and full of curves. The smile, and the glint in the eyes, made you hold your breath, and wish you could hold all the rest. And of course, when I looked at the photo that little memory came running right out into the open.

A couple of years ago that beautiful face had appeared in all of our local newspapers because its owner had eloped

to Mexico with a count who wasn't any more of a count than you are. There had been quite a social howdy-do about it, but after a few days the Harrison dough had clammed up everything tight. And that had been that.

I studied the photo for a couple of moments longer. But not for strictly professional reasons.

"And you have not heard from her?" I murmured. Then shooting a quick look at him, "Or from anybody else?"

He made a gesture as though brushing the question aside. Or maybe because it annoyed him. He fished into his pocket again and came up with a checkbook and fountain pen.

"Find Helen by six o'clock tomorrow night, Lacey," he said, "and I will pay you ten thousand dollars."

He looked at me as he spoke the last, but I have iron control over my reflexes when I have to. And I had it then. He frowned. "How much for a retainer?" he snapped.

I don't know why, maybe it's because big shots can rile me easily, but I answered, "Nothing." And framed the picture by lighting a cigarette.

He slapped his checkbook shut, stuck it back into his pocket, and stood up.

"Good, then," he said, and hesitated, biting a thin lower lip, "There's just one thing, Lacey," he finally continued, "the matter of discretion. Do anything, use any methods you see fit, but be discreet."

I wanted to laugh. I must protect the fine old Harrison name!

"I understand, sir," I said rising. "One more question, though. Why the time limit?"

He bored me with his eyes, and I'll admit I didn't like it. "My whole life has been governed by time limits," he said. "It's a habit. Good-day, Lacey. I'm in the phone book, if there is anything else."

"Good-day, sir," I murmured, and watched him march out.

But know something? On the way to the door darned if he didn't bend over, pick up that half buck of mine, and slip it into his pocket! Right! The Harrison B. Harrison rule for riches, no doubt. Gather up the dough the saps throw away!

WELL, I dropped into my desk chair and spent ten or fifteen minutes working on a few angles that occurred to me, and wolf-gazing at the photograph of the lovely mad-as-a-hatter Helen Fenton Harrison. Then presently the inner man signaled that it was time to close up shop and go out for the evening meal. So I performed the first duty, and went down out of the building and over to the lot where I parked my car. I was behind the wheel and putting the key in place when I noticed the sealed envelope on the seat beside me.

I ripped it open and took out what was inside. The pencil printed words read,

Just forget the old man came to see you. A thousand dollars is better than a bullet!

That's what it read, and it was unsigned. And clipped to the note were ten brand new century notes!

They looked wonderful, and they were wonderful to the touch, too. I unclipped them, and put them in my pocket. Then I read the note again. No soap. No bright ideas. It was printed in pencil on dime store paper. I leaned back and thought it over. Quite a problem. A thousand bucks to skip the whole thing. Ten thousand to make good and find the dame. A loss of nine thousand if I let it ride. The loss of my life, maybe, if I didn't. I decided to see how things shaped up on a full stomach.

On the way out I asked the parking attendant if he'd seen anybody fooling around my car. He shook his head, but that didn't mean anything. The Marines could have taken off the tires, and that dopey lunk wouldn't have noticed. His draft board had rated him 104-F!

Well, there are two things I'm particular about. Women and food, so I drove across town to a little French restaurant that serves all the things I like best. On the way I had the feeling I get a lot of times in my business. Namely, that I was being followed. But by the time I reached the restaurant I was too hungry to keep on going and really make sure.

So I parked, and went inside, and ordered, and had some more thoughts for myself. In a way, a debate, I suppose. What have you got to go on, I asked myself. Just the photograph of a dame who walked out of an argument with her money heavy grandfather. She may be in town, or she may be in New York or Los Angeles. So? In your pocket you have one thousand bucks. One thou-

sand cash to relax and tell Harrison B. Harrison at six o'clock tomorrow night that you're sorry but this was one you just couldn't crack. A thousand bucks for some twenty-six hours of just relaxing. Not bad pay at all.

In that mood I ate my dinner, paid for it, bought a deck of Luckies, and went out to the car ripping off the wrapper. I lighted up behind the wheel, and sat there thinking some more. Supposing I went after that ten grand . . . and, brother, I had decided on that come hell or high water—where would I start looking? A million places, considering it was the Harrison dame. Including under the rug!

Well, maybe a ride around would give me an idea. Riding had helped out the old head a few times before, so why not give it another whirl? I started the car, tooled it away from the curb, and went rolling along with the traffic. I had rolled about ten blocks when I suddenly got one of those tiny breaks you can, if you're lucky and smart, work up into lots of other things. I mean, that I suddenly knew for sure that I was being tailed.

It was a Buick that looked just like a million other Buicks, except that it was a blue black and blended in nice with traffic. I pegged it in the rear view mirror, though, and after a couple of turns I knew that it was following me. But no amateur stuff. The guy behind the wheel, and I couldn't see him clear, or if there was anybody with him, was good. He was very good. I pulled the slow, and I pulled the fast. He stayed right with me at the respectful, not to be observed distance.

When I was dead sure, I grinned. I was happy again, and full of hope, and stuff. The kind donor of one thousand dollars was simply protecting his investment! So that was fine, and now I could go to work. The first job, of course, being to have a look at who was driving the tail car, and whoever was with him. I know lots of people in town, and quite a few of them are chaps accustomed to trailing other people around in cars.

SO I went to work. I acted like I hadn't the faintest idea that I was being tailed. On the contrary I acted like a guy trying to find a certain address and was having the devil's own job of it. I went up this street and down that one, working out into the residential section. And then I found what I was looking for. It was a taxi parked in front of a house with the flag down.

I rolled past it, saw the cabby reading a tabloid sheet while he waited, and shook hands with myself. I went on and turned the next block. The Buick came around just as I was turning again. I rolled down the street in back of the one where the taxi was parked, and turned right again. Then I stepped on the gas and whirled around to the taxi street in I might say nothing flat. I braked into the curb four houses down from the taxi, and was out and running before my rubber had stopped whining.

I streaked for the cab and leaped in back. The cabby jumped, and twisted around.

"Hey! This is—"

I was waving a saw-buck at him by then from the floor.

"For you if you turn around and go on reading!" I snapped. "Quick, bud!"

Being a cabby he caught on fast. He twisted front and stuck his nose in the tabloid. I eased up and peeked out of a corner of the rear window. The Buick was just turning into the street, after braking before it over-shot. It came along, slowly. I could see the three guys in it clearly. One behind the wheel, and two sitting in back. As the car rolled by mine all three of them stared up at the house.

Then slowly it came on, and I crouched low and held my breath. For a second I thought they were going to stop just abreast of the cab, but they didn't. The Buick rolled on up the street. I eased up and watched it swing into the curb on our side five houses up. So that was that. The lads were going to sit it out.

A half-idea was taking shape in my head when I heard an indistinct yell, and somebody's front door bang shut. That crystallized the idea.

"Keep reading, cabby, but listen," I said quietly. "Ten more for you to stick your flag up and pull away from here for town."

"Nothing doing!" I got back. "I'm waiting for a regular. I gotta stick. What's the big idea, anyway?"

"Twenty bucks!" I snapped. "Just to drive a few blocks from here. You can come right back. What have you got to lose, pal?"

He gave it five seconds thought, and then started his engine. As he tooled away from the curb he reached over and flipped up the meter flag. I belly hugged that floor, and held my breath. I also held my gun in my hand, because you never can tell. But everything went smooth as silk. Four blocks and a couple of turns later I knew the Buick had stayed put. My boy pulled into the curb, and turned to me.

"Oke, this is far enough!" he said. "And I hope you weren't kidding about that dough, bub!"

The mean eye he gave me was inviting, but I had chores to do. I pulled thirty bucks from my roll and gave it to him.

"This, plus a word, pal," I said when I was on the sidewalk. "The guys in that Buick that parked were heeled. Tough babies. I hope they don't ask you any questions. Catch on?"

"Hey! You mean—?"

I walked away from him quite satisfied that his "regular" would have to phone for another cab, or walk to whereever he was going. One block down, and two blocks over I hopped into another cab parked at a regulation rank. This cabby was reading, too. But he tossed the paper down on the seat beside him as soon as I stepped in.

"Where to?"

I told him to take me to a drive-ur-self place down town and to step on it. He did and fifteen minutes later I was rolling by myself in a hired car on the main highway west of town, toward open country. And the old brain was spinning over just as fast as the four wheels. As I had figured, or rather prayed for, the little break had opened up a whole lot of possibilities. But whether they were all going to turn out in my favor was something else again. I mean, that in my business sometimes you do it by one little considered step at a time. And sometimes, when you have part of the picture, you take a running flying leap for the rest of it. The latter was what I was doing, because there wasn't enough time on my side to take it slow.

ANYWAY, about twelve miles out I saw the colored neon signs of a very flashy roadhouse. The "Come Inn," it was called. And whenever you have a hundred bucks or so to pay for nothing, The Come Inn is the place to head for. True, if you're a sucker you'll come away thinking you've had a swell time. But . . . but, skip it. Barnum was right, as we all know.

I eased off speed and slid into the parking space, cut the ignition and went inside. The place was well filled, and everybody was having a grand time trying to drown out the ten piece band with their giggles, shrieks, and goofy chatter. I went to the bar, and had a quick one. Then I walked through a curtained opening at one side toward a suite of rooms where Chips Logan, the owner, maintained his offices. Chips and I had known each other for a few years. Whether we liked each other's racket was something else. But we had never tangled professionally, so at least there weren't any hard feelings between us. Maybe we each figured the other was just a little too hot in his own way.

Well, I hadn't taken three steps beyond the curtains before a big ape blocked my path. And I do mean he was a big ape. And he didn't have his hand in his right dinner jacket pocket to keep it warm.

"Want somebody, Mister?" he asked and, not being sure, smiled.

"Yeah. Chips," I told him, and smiled too. "Lacey is the name. On business. Tell him, will you?"

He worked his heavy brows on that for a moment, and seemed to find no fault with it.

"Wait, Mister," he said, and turned and went through one of the doors.

I waited two minutes, and then he came back, and nodded and held the door open.

"Go on in," he told me.

I walked into a very fancy furnished business office. But I wasn't interested in the furnishings. I was only interested in Chips Logan seated in back of a desk. He was about my age, and, I'll admit, twice as good looking. He was in evening clothes, and if you were to meet him at a party you'd be very impressed. Believe me, Chips was no mug. He was a very smart business man. He greeted me with a cordial smile that didn't extend to his eyes, however.

"Evening, Lacey," he said, and pulled a tray of drink makings toward him. "Have one? Sit down, sit down."

"Thanks," I said sitting. "I do need one, bad."

He raised an eyebrow at that and

splashed Scotch and soda into the proper places and handed me mine.

"Trouble?" he echoed quietly. "Is that why you're here?"

I nodded, took a sip, and grinned kind of sheepishly.

"Funny, isnt it?" I said with a forced laugh. "I once swore I'd never go to any one of you boys for help, but here I am. I'm up a tree, Chips. And you're a guy who hears things. Maybe I could do you a favor some day."

"Maybe," he said into his drink. "What's the beef?"

"This case," I said with a frown. "I'm looking for a dame. A wild, crazy kid. She's just disappeared."

"A snatch?" he asked watching me. "And who?"

"I'll skip the name, but she's dough," I said with a gesture of my drink-free hand. "And I'm not playing it for a snatch. I don't think it is."

Logan yawned and glanced at his wrist watch. "So why come to me?" he murmured.

"I don't know, exactly," I said, and half-laughed again. "Except this. No sooner am I started trying to figure some angles than somebody drops a grand in my car, with a lay-off note. Well, the chump is out one grand because I'm going to find this dame! But tell me this, Chips. Do you know of anybody new in town who would think me sap enough to fall for a cheap scare like that?"

He looked at me and laughed. "Relax, Lacey," he said. "Or maybe we don't know each other. Do you think I would admit it, if I did?"

I let myself look angry-hurt, and then sighed and shrugged and got up.

"Okay, okay, I get it," I said. "I think I can find the dame. But it was that dime a dozen cheap skate, who thought he could buy me off with a grand, I'm interested in. Oh well, thanks for the drink, and nothing else. Be seeing you, Chips. S'long."

"S'long, Lacey," he said uninterested. "And luck."

I stopped at the bar for another one before I went out to my car. I smoked a cigarette before I switched on the ignition key, and then I started driving back toward town. One eye on the road because it was dark, now. And the other on the rear view mirror. Three miles later the tailing car—that had picked me up again when I left Logan's—hadn't gained or lost an inch on me. I grinned and the happiness stock hit a new high.

We stayed just as we were all the way back to town. At least as far as the residential outskirts. Then the Lacey began to do his fancy stuff. I mean, I began to give that tail car driver a real job to perform. And I also mean, I really did. Half an hour later I had shaken him free, and my hired heap was doing seventy along a road that led straight to the mountains south of town.

PRETTY soon, though, it became upgrade, and the road twisted this way and that, so I had to ease off the speed. And fifteen minutes after that, when I topped a rise that fell down toward a mountain framed lake, I switched off the lights, killed the engine, and started coasting. There was no moon. In fact the entire heavens were clouded over. Luck was with me, though. I coasted two and a half miles down grade without having to brake quick once. At the bottom I let the car roll off a narrow dirt road until it was hidden from the main highway.

I sat in the car doing a couple of things that needed doing, and then I got out and started walking. The lodge was about four hundred yards away—right by the lake and there were lights in two or three rooms, all on the ground floor. I circled the place twice. Then I went up to the front door and knocked. A couple of moments later it was opened by a very beefy, and tough-looking gent. He had a gun in his dangling hand, but I had expected that.

The boob hardly saw me. My gun muzzle broke his nose, and my right foot went inches into his stomach. As he fell I crowned him clean, dead center. Brutal? Sure! But fast and so effective. I dumped him in a coat closet to my right, turned the key and dropped it in my pocket. Then I slipped my gun back into its shoulder holster, closed the door, and walked along the hall and to the right into a comfy-furnished living room.

Helen Fenton Harrison sat reading a book, and a drink at her side, over by a crackling log fire. When I came in she looked up with a smile. Then frowned. And then smiled again.

"Hello!" she said in a voice that matched the figure under the house gown. "Who are you?"

"Just a guy," I said casually, and walked over and dropped into a chair. "Just a guy earning a dollar. Could I have a drink?"

She frowned at me, and absently waved at the makings on the coffee table.

"Help yourself," she said. "You say, earning a dollar? What do you mean? And, who are you?"

"Lacey is the name," I told her, and mixed one. "Chet Lacey to nice people, and pretty girls."

She didn't know how to take that, and didn't waste any time on it. Instead she laughed, and drank deep of what was in her glass.

"Dear old H.B.H.!" she trilled. "So he hired Chet Lacey, the famous private detective? Poor old grandpappy! He'll just never realize that I'm of age and have a mind of my own!"

"He's a nice old boy," I said, and drank.

"A darling, when he doesn't play king," she said. "How much is he paying you, Chet?"

I grinned and shook my head. "We're to talk that over later," I said. Then finishing my drink, "Well, let's go. He's waiting."

She looked at me as though I was nuts. Then she smiled, shook her golden locks and wiggled very nicely to a more comfy position in her chair.

"Uh-uh, Chet," she said. "Have another drink, because maybe you didn't hear me. I'm of age. I do as I darn please! You tell that to H.B.H. when you see him. Also what he can do with the money I'm supposed to get when I marry a man of whom he approves!"

There was the real old fire in her eyes when she spoke the last. And I guess I felt a little sorry for the kid. But business is business with me. I had myself a drink, and glanced casually around, and wished the hair on the back of my neck would stop quivering. So far so good for the Lacey, but more than once in the past have the Lacey's well laid plans been kicked to the moon.

"And he didn't like Chips Logan?" I murmured, watching her. "Or doesn't he know?"

She laughed and threw her head back. She had a nice throat.

"Would I be here if—" she began and

[*Turn page*]

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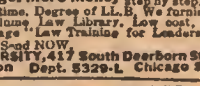

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stopped short. Then putting down her drink, "Which reminds me! Just how did you get here?"

At that instant I thought I heard something, but I didn't take my eyes off her face.

"Your current heart throb is a dope, Helen," I said in a flat level voice. "He gave three of his boys a little job to do. Three of his lads whose maps are as familiar to me as Truman's picture. I simply added two and two. The Come Inn is too noisy and crowded for you. Much better Chips' lake lodge. So, here I am."

"Yes, chum," came Chips Logan's voice right in back of me. "So here you are, is right!"

I didn't move a muscle as Logan's hand slid over and around in front of me, and took away my shoulder holstered gun. Then he stepped around me where I could see him. Also his own gun that he had in his right hand.

"My old friend been bothering you, sweet?" he said to the dame.

She made oh-such eyes at him, and shook her golden mop.

"Why no, darling," she exclaimed. "I think he's cute!"

I didn't check the squirm in time. Logan laughed over at me as he motioned for Helen to mix him one.

"Hello, cutey!" he jeered. "Or should I say chump?"

I gave him a steady smile, and an eye he could figure about for a while if he wanted to.

"Depends if you're looking in a mirror, Chips," I said easily, and put my three-quarters finished drink on the coffee table. "If you know what I mean?"

"Perfectly," he said just as easily. "But your little act at the Inn fell sort of flat, didn't it?"

I gave him a surprised look. "Flat?" I echoed. "Why, Chips! It paid off one hundred per cent!"

That baffled him enough to make him blink, and absently heft his gun in his hand. I leaned over a little and rested my spread hands on my knees.

"Certainly!" I jabbed it in. "You should have driven yourself. The guy who did drive was a bum."

He sneered and I didn't feel too good as he started rubbing his index finger up and down the curve of the trigger.

"That bum was me, Lacey," he said. "Important things I always handle alone!"

"Hey! Am I an orphan around here, or something?"

I didn't give Chips a chance to tell her yes or no.

It was a ripe time for my long shot in the dark.

"The old boy isn't going to come through by six o'clock tomorrow night, Chips," I said with a grin. "You see, I told him not to."

Logan stiffened. His lips went a little thin, and his eyes very hard.

"No?" was all he said.

"No," I said. Then, "But I'm curious. Just how much did you figure to get out of him, anyway? A million? Is the Inn in the red that much, Chips?"

Little lights began to dance about his eyes. And to be truthful, little chills began to dance up and down my spine. But right at that instant Helen busted into the conversation again. And busted, because she was both mad, and puzzled.

"Say, what's this all about?" she demanded looking from Logan to me. "What about six o'clock tomorrow night? What about a million, and my grandfather? What—"

I stopped her by jerking my head at Logan.

"The price, beautiful," I said. "A guess at the price your love flame expects your grandfather to pay for not marrying you! By six o'clock tomorrow night!"

She blinked, and then laughed loud. Logan laughed too. But it was difficult for him because his eyes were spitting all kinds of hate at me.

Then Helen stopped laughing and snorted.

"You a detective, rats!" she snapped. "You can't even understand the English language. I've told you twice that I'm of age! Have I got to start wearing my birth certificate around my neck on a chain?"

"Ha, ha!" said Logan, narrowing his eyes even more. "Lacey, the guy who sees all, knows all!"

"Check!" I said, leaping on the perfect opening. "Lacey the guy who knows all.

One item, Chips. Why you won't marry this lovely!"

"Why not, Lacey?"

LOGAN'S voice was hardly above a whisper. The moment gripped the girl, because though her mouth was open to speak not a sound came out. And me, I wasn't reading any book. I'd bluffed, and probed, and prodded, and jabbed as much as I could. We were all at the peak. Somebody was going to fall off.

"Why, Lacey?" It was like a couple of shots.

"Because, Helen," I said talking fast, "Logan is already married. Has been for years. His wife's a cripple over in the—"

That's as far as I got. She let out a straggled cry, and reached to grab Logan's hand.

"Chips! Say that isn't—"

Maybe she finished it, maybe she didn't. I don't know. I was too busy going into action. Logan's gun pounded

[*Turn page*]

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as I went off my chair fast. I felt the slug burn an inch or two of my back. Then a little twenty-five Logan overlooked tucked in my sock top was in my hand and spitting. The first got him in the throat. The second went through his right eye, even as he shot again and broke a mirror on the far wall.

I let momentum carry me through and came up by Helen, who was staring glassy eyed. In a flash I belted her on the chin with my left hand. She went out like a light, and pitched sidewise over the arm of her chair. By then I had stopped moving. Sucking in air, I waited five full seconds for running footsteps. There were none.

Chips had spoken the truth. He had come alone.

I took a couple of steps and bent over him. He was as dead as they come. I took his gun, and my own. Put mine in my holster, and his in my pocket. Then I went back to the dame, and taking my twenty-five I put it into her right hand; finger crooked on the trigger, and everything. Then I picked up the soda syphon, propped her up a little, and let her have it straight in the face. She came around on the second squirt. Eyes open, and gasping.

"Wh-h-at happened!" She saw Logan and the streams of blood, and went white but didn't pass out. "Oh my heavens! What—"

By then I had a thumb and forefinger on the muzzle of my gun in her hand. As she stared dull eyed I took the gun out of her hand and carefully wrapped it in a clean handkerchief. Then as she continued to stare I dropped handkerchief and gun in my pocket.

"You little fool!" I bit off at her. "You should have let me take care of him. But, no! You go crazy when you learn he's married, and will leave you flat just as soon as your grandfather comes through. So when he clouts you on the jaw, you go haywire and let him have this!"

I touched my pocket that had the wrapped-up gun and watched her. She blinked a couple of times, and then shook her head wildly.

"No, no!" she cried. "That isn't my gun! That's yours! I didn't—"

"*Didn't* you?" I cut her off, and

slapped her face. "Baby, your prints are on this gun. And two slugs from this gun are in him! You figure it out. Come on!"

I half expected trouble, but I didn't have a bit of it. She let me lift her to her feet, hand under her arm, and lead her out of the place. I led her down to where my car was parked, and put her in the front seat. She was like a lump of clay and just as cold. But just before I started the car she looked at me glassy-eyed and spoke.

"Was that true?" she said in a dull voice. "Was—was he married?"

"He was," I said with proper emphasis. "It's a hobby of mine to learn all I can about the smooth boys in this town. That was a little item I've known about Chips Logan for quite some time. So when I knew it was you two, it was easy enough to figure out what angle Chips was playing. Now, I'm going to play my angle! I told you I was earning myself a dollar."

SHE asked me what I meant by that, but I just gave her a hard laugh and backed the car out of that dirt road onto the main one. And I kept it like that all the way back to the street driveway end of her grandfather's place. By then she was trembling, and crying softly. Like the way her kind does, when the toy house falls down, and they get sky-blue-pink scared.

Parking, I reached across her and opened the door.

"Out, baby, and get a good night's sleep," I said tough like. "And tell your grandfather that maybe I got a gun for sale."

"But I never saw that gun!" she got out with a terrible effort. "It isn't mine.

[*Turn page*]

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I don't remember—"

"So maybe it isn't yours!" I slapped at her. "Maybe Chips gave it to you for company while at the Inn. But it has your prints on it, and the two slugs are in Chips. Now beat it. The old boy knows where to reach me!"

The old boy reached me a couple of hours later. At my apartment. I was having a night cap when he pounded on the door, and jabbed the bell button all at the same time. I opened up, and he came in on fire. I half expected to see an old Civil War pistol in each bony fist. He kicked the door shut and glared at me.

"So ten thousand wasn't enough, eh?" he roared. "You intend to blackmail me! To bleed me until—"

"Shut up!" I rapped at him. "That gun business was just an additional service rendered!"

He gulped, and let his thin frame sink down into my best chair. I pushed a bottle toward him but he shook his head absently.

"You mean, then . . .?" he began. "You mean, about Helen shooting . . .?"

"Exactly!" I cut him off again. "An extra service. To teach her the kind of a lesson you haven't been able to in all these years she's been running wild."

He started to speak, but drank straight from the bottle first. "I see," he said in a low voice. "Tell me the whole story, will you?"

So I told him the story from the time he'd left my office until I'd dumped his dizzy granddaughter in his driveway.

"I did that gun stunt to scare some sense into her crazy, empty head," I finished up hard voiced. "Obviously she's run to you for help and protection. Well, that's what you want. Don't tell her the truth. Keep her as she is for a while. The right guy is bound to come along sooner or later."

"There has been one right along," the

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old boy said as though talking to himself. "Yes. Maybe now Helen will listen to him. But, Lacey, I don't like to think of Helen going through life thinking—"

"She doesn't have to," I stopped him the third time. "Tell her the truth for a wedding present. But right now you tell her this. Why did you hold back from me that Logan had contacted you and propositioned for so much dough not to marry your daughter? And how much was it?"

"Two hundred thousand," he said. "It was a phone call. I didn't know who. He was going to tell me where to send the money tonight. I . . . Lacey, I was afraid Helen was a part of it. She hasn't any money of her own, you see? I thought she was putting somebody up to it, knowing I'd pay. I said nothing to you, hoping that you'd simply find her and bring her home to me."

The poor dear old dope! He still didn't catch on that his granddaughter was of age, and that not even the Lacey could have brought her home to stay.

"And why didn't you?" he asked, and pulled out his checkbook. "When you figured where she probably was, why didn't you go straight there, instead of going to the Come Inn first?"

"Because your granddaughter's of age!" I practically shouted at him. "So I had to make her see the picture as it really was. Get Logan there, and rub him around to where he'd bust loose. And—drat it, Harrison! The lure has been removed. Isn't that even better still?"

He looked at me, and I saw the light dawn. He scribbled on a check, ripped it out, and handed it to me. I took a gander at it, and gasped. Harrison B. Harrison chuckled, and reached for the bottle.

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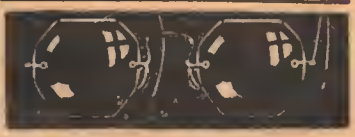

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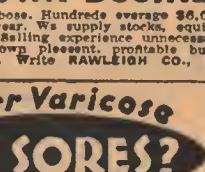

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LETTERS FROM READERS

YOU are invited to write letters to this column. If you'd like to tell us ways in which you think our magazine can be improved, we'd be glad to hear from you. If you have any complaints to register, we'll try

to smile and welcome them too. Or maybe you'd just like to write to pass the time of day.

In any case, let's hear from you.

That certainly is a nifty looking cover girl you have on your recent issue of POPULAR DETECTIVE. It gave me the shivers seeing that hand holding the blood-dripping dagger, and apparently ready to go for her. I was much relieved to turn to page 114 of the same magazine and see by the picture there that she'd managed to get the knife away somehow, and was making off with it.—*Perry L. Otis, Houston, Texas.*

The girl's name is Joan—but we're—not giving out any phone numbers.

You know what your mag lacks? A husband-and-wife detective team that go around putting their noses into murder.—*Sonder Wegroth, Green Bay, Wisc.*

Oh yeah? Well, just put your nose in our next issue and read a story called A HUNTING WE WILL GO, by Edward Churchill. It has a Mr. and Mrs. doing the detecting.

Can't say I cared much for A COLD NIGHT FOR MURDER, by J. Lane Linklater. But I thought I'LL TAKE THAT RAP, by Robert Leslie Bellem, was swell!—*Chloe McMeechen, Moundsville, West Va.*

So you're complaining, huh? What do you want us to do—please everybody? Maybe you think it can be done. Well, just look at this:

. . . I enjoyed A COLD NIGHT FOR MURDER, by J. Lane Linklater, but I'LL TAKE THAT RAP, by Robert Leslie Bellem, was just plain, unadulterated cheese.—*Martin Wagstaff, Jr., New Vienna, Ohio.*

See, Chloe, it can't be done. What you call meat, Wagstaff calls cheese. You'll just have to be patient.

The Willie Klump stories make me laugh myself sick. I have never read anything as funny as them, and can hardly wait till the next issue to read another one.—*Mrs. Waltha Agash, Dade City, Fla.*

We hope you continue to laugh yourself sick, Mrs. Agash. And then have speedy recoveries, of course.

We do like to get your letters, everybody, and hope yours is among those selected to be printed in the next issue. We especially value your criticism of the stories, for it helps us keep on improving the mag. Address all letters and postcards to The Editor, POPULAR DETECTIVE, 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N.Y. See you next issue. Until then—good luck!

THE EDITOR

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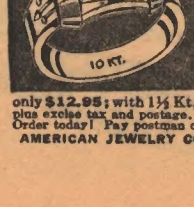

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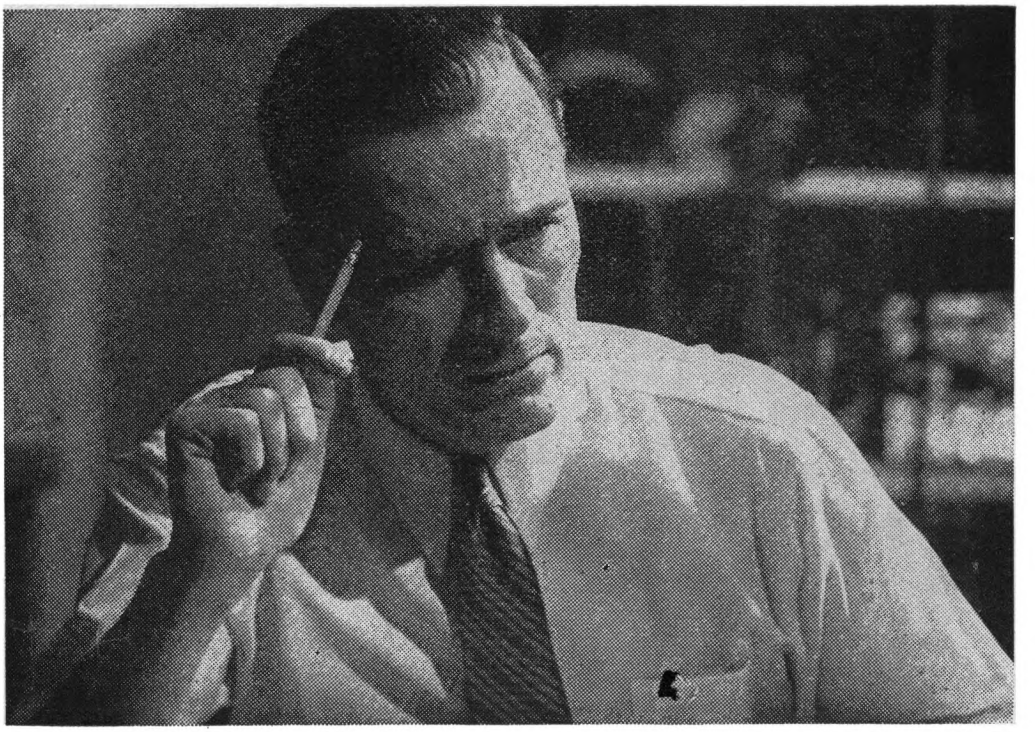

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